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# MODERN MEN
# AND MUMMERS

# MODERN MEN AND MUMMERS

BY

HESKETH PEARSON

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# CONTENTS

## MODERN MEN AND MUMMERS

PAGE

I. Bernard Shaw . . . . 11

II. Sir Herbert Tree . . . . 38

III. Sir Francis Galton . . . . 63

IV. Sir George Alexander . . . 80

V. Frank Harris . . . . . 102

VI. Lytton Strachey . . . . 133

VII. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson . . 140

VIII. Stephen Phillips . . . . 146

IX. Frank Benson . . . . . 157

X. Robert Ross . . . . . 161

XI. Playwright Producers . . . 170

## POST-IMPRESSIONS

I. H. G. Wells . . . . . 183

II. Edmund Gosse . . . . . 185

III. Arthur Bourchier . . . . 187

IV. Mrs. Asquith . . . . . 190

PAGE

V. SIR HALL CAINE . . . . . 192

VI. LEWIS WALLER . . . . . 197

VII. WINSTON CHURCHILL . . . 199

VIII. JOSEPH CONRAD . . . . . 201

IX. DEAN INGE . . . . . . 203

X. MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL . . . 204

XI. FATHER BERNARD VAUGHAN . . 206

XII. IRENE VANBRUGH . . . . . 208

XIII. LLOYD GEORGE . . . . . 210

XIV. GENEVIÈVE WARD . . . . . 212

XV. "JOHN BULL" . . . . . 214

XVI. THE IRVINGS . . . . . . 216

XVII. THE CHESTERTONS . . . . . 218

XVIII. GERALD CUMBERLAND . . . 221

# MODERN MEN AND MUMMERS

# I

# BERNARD SHAW

WE moderns are the products of Bernard Shaw. In that whole riot of imaginary nonsense which G. K. Chesterton gave to the world under the heading of "George Bernard Shaw," there stands out one very fine and very true thing—the summary of Shaw's ennobling influence on the spirit of his age. The rest of the book is worthless as a criticism of Shaw though interesting as a revelation of Chesterton.

The thing that alienated most people from Shaw was precisely the thing that first drew me to him; I mean the pamphlet entitled "Commonsense about the War" which he issued in November, 1914. It is the greatest piece of journalism, the finest tract for the times, he has ever written. It should be republished in a small pocket edition and presented to every budding politician as a model of how statesmen ought to use their heads when other people lose theirs. It is the classic text-book of mental balance and sobriety. Incidentally, too, it was the pluckiest thing Shaw ever did; and, although unrecognized as such at the time, it typified the spirit of the average Englishman who won the war as distinct from the average Englishman who talked twaddle about how it ought to be won. The sane instinct behind that pamphlet was the sane instinct of the men who fought in the trenches and on the deserts. Of course it gained the author a pretty thorough share of obloquy at the time, but (as I found in the East) jackals invariably howl when they scent a thoroughbred.

Thus it was not till 1914 that I began to read Shaw's books seriously. Among modern authors, he was the only first-class pre-war writer in England who is not a post-war back-number. And, dreadful to relate, his influence has developed so enormously that there is every possibility of his shortly being accepted as a classic, even by the professional critics.

As everyone knows, Shaw's longer plays and prefaces are penetrating studies of prevailing sociological conditions—all except three. The immense superiority of his "Three Plays for Puritans" over all his other works is so remarkable that I am amazed to find their peculiar significance passed over by every critic who has worried himself about Shaw. And yet to me it is the one outstanding and immortal thing about the man. Of course he doesn't think so himself, but then he is his own worst critic. He prefers the formless dialectic of "Getting Married" and "Misalliance" to the deeper, simpler things of an earlier period.

Now there are three or four subjects fundamental to all great art, at the root of all philosophy, and perennially interesting throughout the ages. The best work of all the greatest artists and prophets has concerned itself with one or other of these things. Indeed that best work has often helped to keep alive the propaganda, journalism and pot-boilers which nearly every great artist produces alongside of it. One of these things is Religion. Another is Statecraft. A third is Sex. These are the chief, the primal topics of the world. They always have been and they always will be. In comparison with them everything else is local, national, and of momentary value. Any work of philosophy or art that does not deal with one of these things cannot be regarded as of the slightest ultimate importance. And according to the spiritual significance given to these themes, the larger outlook, the freer mind, so will the prophet-artist live in the memory of later ages. In most works, ancient as well as modern, Religion is degraded to the level of a bigoted sectarianism, Statecraft is confused with politics and patriotism, and Sex is debased for the glorification of lust or sentiment.

With regard to Sex, the trouble is that in all discussions on the subject nearly everybody disagrees. It seems that no two thinking people have a single common idea about it. So, while it will continue to be the main theme for controversialists, it will never be settled to anyone's complete satisfaction. In "Man and Superman," "Getting Married" and elsewhere, Shaw has succeeded in clearing the ground of much sloppy and dirty thinking, but in this instance his emotion—always an intellectual one—does not reach down into our natures deep enough to gain the response we can easily give where the appeal is more general than personal.

But with the other two matters he is on sure ground. All intensely religious people are exactly alike. They are all outcasts, all despised and rejected of men and women, all hopelessly unconventional, free-tongued, fanatical, violent, unsentimental, unromantic, careless and fearless of people and things. They have been symbolized for ever in the character of the Devil's Disciple—the hated enemy of Scribes and Pharisees all the world over, the sedition-monger who must be burnt or crucified, the man who is more dangerous to the ruling classes than a thousand Barabbases, the fellow who does not aspire to an upper place in the feast-room and who will not go to church every sabbath in a top hat and "mourning" coat.

"The Devil's Disciple" was the first play to be written and acted in the English language with a big constructive idea behind it. It will remain vital to us as long as the audiences that witness it approximate more nearly to Dick Dudgeon's relations than to himself. And it will never cease to be remembered as one of the glorious milestones on our journey towards the light.

Religion, then, was the first eternal theme that Shaw grappled with. He has touched on it frequently since, but never again with the hand of a master-artist, nor with the glowing prophetic power he then displayed. There are a dozen other things in the play that would have made the fame of smaller men, but the great central fact and inspiration about it is the faith and force of Dudgeon. Still, it is impossible not to mention Anderson, parson of parsons, who arrives at self-knowledge through action, and, being an honest man, throws over his job of word-purveyor to the parish; and General Burgoyne, already by consent a classic notability. To my mind, Burgoyne is the most finished, picturesque and delightful portrait of a born aristocrat ever penned. The only criticism one can make about him is that nowadays the sort of person who has his brains wouldn't have his opinions. His humour suits him as perfectly as his clothes, and his wit is as beautifully polished as his manners. He is inimitable—a creation of unbounded joy, done for pure love. I would like to go on talking about him and his exquisite niche in the Temple of Literature, but I am awed to silence by a remark his creator once made to me: "I don't take the slightest interest in literature with a capital L. I am a prophet, not a fancier!"

Too many people have got into the habit of reading criticisms on writers instead of the works criticized. This perhaps accounts for the utterly wrong estimation of Shaw's finest achievements. I have no wish to explain why G. B. S. is right, or why wrong, in this or that controversial matter. (He is usually right, by the way.) I merely wish to insist that on two or three occasions he has written works that are quite outside the question of agreement or disagreement, that these works deal with the big fundamental things of life, not the local and topical things, and that he has given us, by dramatic characterization, immortal symbols for them.

I once asked him why he didn't write a book in reply to the ridiculous things that had been written about him, especially Chesterton's rigmarole which so thoroughly distorted his outlook. He answered:

"Chesterton's book is a very good one in itself. It has little to do with me, as G. K. C. has never made any study of my works, and in one place actually illustrates my limitations by telling the world something I would have made one of the characters say in Major Barbara if I could have transcended those limitations: the joke being that it is exactly what I did make the character say, as Chesterton might have found had he taken the trouble to open the book (probably he never possessed a copy) and refer to the passage. But if you leave me out of account, you will find, I think, that the book is full of good things, and very generous into the bargain."

Some little time later I sent him a pen-portrait of himself by Frank Harris, and he wrote:

"Frank Harris cannot really do a good Contemporary Portrait of me because he has never read my works. It is true that Gilbert Chesterton wrote a very good book under the same disqualification; but it was not about me, and it was a sort of book that Frank can't write."

The second of the eternal world-themes, Statecraft, was superbly treated by Shaw in "Caesar and Cleopatra," where for the first and only time in English dramatic literature a great statesman and man of action is painted to the life. This play is Shaw's master-work. It reveals himself, his very soul, and at the same time it gives us, in the character of Caesar, far and away his finest achievement as an objective artist.

Shaw has said all that needs to be said about Caesar, and about natural greatness, in the preface and notes to his play. Every word is incontrovertible: not a phrase can be improved upon. On that matter, therefore, I shall be silent. But there are two points about this play that I wish to discuss briefly, because it has been said stupidly and insistently, by people who ought to know better, that Shaw " guys " history and can't write poetry —which is simply another way of saying he is not an artist.

First, I suppose everyone will agree when I say that the main object of art is to be articulate. The man who has something to express but can't express it is not an artist. The man who conveys his meaning, or expresses himself, most clearly to the greatest number of intelligent or literate people is the supreme artist. This granted—and there is really no other conceivable postulate—Shaw stands on firm ground, for he has received in his own lifetime the verdict of cultured Asia, as well as Europe and America. (While I was in India I found that the native students could only converse about two English writers : Shakespeare and Shaw.) So much for art. That curious searching after a means, that attempt to formulate impressions, which has marked and doomed so much modern painting (by reason of the fact that it can only be appreciated through alcoholic fumes or by closing one eye and crossing the other) has no distant relationship with living art. The only art worth the name is the art of realism, or, a better term still, naturalism. This is the art of Shaw, and he is the greatest dramatic exponent of it since Shakespeare. He has, besides, gone much further than Shakespeare, by adding the rôle of prophet to that of artist.

The absurd charge that Shaw " guys " history can be easily met with the question : " Who does not ?" How is it possible to prove that any fictional or dramatic representation of history is purely historical ? Shaw took all the necessary details from Mommsen, who was far more exact than Plutarch, from whom Shakespeare took his story ; and while Shaw keeps close to Mommsen even in the characterization, Shakespeare left Plutarch on several important points. Of the two, then, Shakespeare "guys" history and Shaw is slavishly correct. Suppose Shaw had suggested that "ping-pong" was the favourite relaxation of all wealthy Egyptians in Cleopatra's time. "Absurd and monstrous anachronism !" the English critics would have crowed. Yet Shakespeare is allowed to mention billiards in "Antony and Cleopatra" without bringing on his head anything worse than a scholarly footnote of deferential expostulation, qualified by complete absolution on the ground of poetic license—because he wrote in an archaic language. But all this is beside the point. An artist can only interpret the actions and characters in history by reference to the life and humanity he knows ; and he can only render a faithful picture of ancient modernity by its equivalent in present-day modernity. For the world is always modern and human nature appallingly ancient.

Shakespeare set the disastrous fashion of making history walk on stilts. He was not the first to do so, but he was the most important, and his example has ruined historical drama to this day. Of course Shakespeare did it excellently, made history stalk about on the finest gold and jewelled stilts obtainable, but it was an unfortunate thing to do. It has made writers with little genius, and readers as well, get hold of the idea that kings and their like must talk pompously and bombastically in pentametrical cadences. Kings don't do it and never have done it. There would be a much longer list of royal executions to record if the practice had ever been a general one. It is just possible that such a habit may explain the so-called heartless behaviour of rival monarchs in pre-Jacobean days; and this would certainly clear up the Malmsey wine mystery, on the principle that another "butt" in addition to what the gentleman had already taken would make his verse entirely blank. However, that is only a theory. The thing to bear in mind is that Shakespeare's Richard II, for instance, is a creature of unalloyed fancy. He no more belongs to our world than the idea of Divine Right, which pleases him, belongs to practical politics.

Shaw realized that the only way to explain history, to make it attractive and life-like, was to write it in the phraseology of his own time. We may be sure that Caesar had a colloquialism for "hocus-pocus," just as some ancient Briton probably anticipated Mrs. Grundy and Mr. Disraeli, and some early Egyptian toyed with aesthetic ideas or played with psychical beliefs or taunted another (especially when that other was Cleopatra) with being a "New Woman." Cleopatra may have talked, in Shakespeare's words, of her "immortal longings"—though I doubt it—but I am convinced she couldn't have kept her everyday conversation on that level; whereas there can't be the least doubt that she called her nurse an old idiot and her court ladies a pack of silly fools quite frequently.

(Also, having a son of my own, I am in a position to state quite positively that Shakespeare's Arthur isn't in the running with Shaw's Ptolemy!) Romantic history makes Cleopatra say "Yare, yare, good Iras," but natural history would probably make her say "Now, Iras: hurry up." I am not suggesting that Mr. George Robey's method of dealing with history is, in every sense, the right one; but the ancient world undoubtedly had its Robey element just as much as the modern world. Shaw has got his period better than any of your romantic faddists; and he has made history vital to us by spicing it with all his modern charm.

In truth, his interpretation of history is the only possible one, though I willingly admit that he chose an ideal subject for his treatment. His high critical instinct dictated the choice. This Caesar is a living, breathing man. He has his great moments and his trivial moments, and he is always consummately natural. None of your romantic, rubbishy heroics for him!—I mean the kind of stuff Shakespeare puts into the mouth of *his* ideal Roman, Brutus, who is puffed out with self-praise and feeds on the illusions which flatter his public sentiment and his private vanity. Until Shaw wrote "Caesar and Cleopatra" and bodied forth the synthetic, constructive idea, all the notable figures in our literature, from Hamlet to Dick Dudgeon, were at heart revolutionists. Here we have the first great statesman, pioneer, lawgiver, leader of men, in English art. He is the Soul of Man in its fine creative moments, in its aloofness, its solitariness, and its superiority to the pettiness and meanness of ordinary insect-humanity. The miscalled heroes of an earlier day were conceived romantically and manufactured on the artificial and stereotyped plan of assuming greatness where its absence to any but the smallest intelligence was obvious. Like our present-day politicians, they were either "purple patch" demagogues or platitudinous moralists. It is true that Carlyle first touched the right key; but he refused to see weaknesses and faults in his heroes, and ruined his portraits by over-emphasis.

It is as prophet-artist that Shaw reigns supreme. He is the most noteworthy figure among all our dramatists except the author of "Hamlet," and his message is obviously of greater moment than by the nature of the case Shakespeare's could ever have been. In the "Three Plays for Puritans," where he gave us the pith and marrow of his unmatchable faculties, and particularly in "Caesar and Cleopatra," he reveals himself as a poet of rare spiritual beauty and exaltation. One has only to read Caesar's first speech to realize that. "A man," says Scott, "may be a poet without measuring spondees and dactyls like the ancients, or clashing the ends of lines into rhyme like the moderns, as one may be an architect though unable to labour like a stonemason." Caesar is just as much a creature of poetry and passion as he is the creation of the sanest, most evenly balanced mind that ever took to letters for a living. He is inspired in the rare and real sense with a mission—a mission of warning and a mission of hope. In magical sentences of deep poetic insight, he reaches time after time the very heart-core of prophecy. He says the sort of things that stagger one with the reflection that the world has had to wait a few thousand years to hear them. Having waited all that time, it will doubtless be content to wait another century or two before attempting to grasp their significance. And yet perhaps not. After all, the age of the Puritans in England followed as a natural consequence a popular version of the Bible. Superstitions were shattered by the pure and naked word. Ritual gave place to realism, tokens to truths, symbols to sermons. A light in the heart extinguished the lights on the altar. Well, these "Plays for Puritans" might truly be called the Bible of the twentieth century—only (and one cannot be too thankful for it) a Bible with humour, which I sincerely hope the next age of idol-breakers will bear in mind!

"Captain Brassbound's Conversion," though it stands head and shoulders above Shaw's controversial plays in the strength, simplicity and universality of its appeal, is nevertheless a slight production in comparison with the other two works in this volume. It is just a sermon; but it is a sermon by the most delightful of preachers, a sermon that does not send one to sleep. It not only enforces the finer elements in Christianity but explains why the old Mosaic ideas are stupid and hurtful, which Jesus omitted to do. Apart from its moral, however, the play is chiefly memorable for one thing, and we cannot be too grateful for the enduring charm and beauty of the only quite lovable woman in the Shavian portrait gallery. No such gracious tribute to the other sex was ever paid by a man. It is an exquisite creation; and if Shaw has failed—as who has not failed?—to speak the perfect reconciling word on the subject of sex, he has at any rate done the next best thing. Lady Cecily Waynflete is the most enchanting, irresistible thing the art of realism has produced. She is more than that. She is a positive character, constructive in the Caesarian sense : that is to say, she accepts life as it is and tries to make the best of it—she doesn't perpetually whine that life is not what she would like it to be, and spend her own existence in railing at it. She is, in fact, the creator and shield, the eternal Mother, in woman.

* * * * *

Three things struck me when I first read Shaw's works through without a break. First, that he had not dealt with law as comprehensively as the other big social matters. Second, that he had wasted far too much of his time in turning out pot-boilers. Third, that his work spread over too great a field for easy assimilation by the average reader. I wrote to him on these lines ; but he wouldn't have it at any price. Here is his answer :

"If you won't read my works by degrees, you must at least ask questions about them by degrees. How can I answer for my whole life to you between one bit of crowded work and another ? You are worse than the Recording Angel.

"Hastily, I have said a good deal about judges and the criminal law in the course of my writings ; and I do not know that I have anything to add. I wish I had taken law up as a profession, as it is a subject that interests me very strongly ; but it is too late now, and I have said my say as to the general human aspect of it.

"I do not waste my time writing pot-boilers: the pot must be boiled, and even my *pot au feu* has some chunks of fresh meat in it.

"The Golden Treasury is no doubt needed, but I have to take my work as it comes and other people must do the same. There is no royal road to Shavianism. My wife has made a book of 'selected passages'—but it is no use. The mess of plays, prefaces, tracts and articles from which my philosophy has to be extracted is not only the form imposed by circumstances, but the only form in which it can be properly assimilated. I have no time to boil myself down; and anyhow I could not do so and preserve all the necessary nutriment and the flavouring on which the digestibility depends."

"A most amusing man, but of course you can't take him seriously." Thus the majority of his contemporaries on Bernard Shaw. And every time I hear it I want to tear the speaker's hair out, slowly, by the roots. I have often said that if Jesus appeared in the world to-day, everybody would roar with laughter at his paradoxes and call him a very funny fellow with an irresistibly quaint way of putting things. He might eventually, through journalistic influence, receive the honour of imprisonment—perhaps the highest honour we, as a nation, are able to confer—but in all probability some of his crowning absurdities (e.g. "He that shall save his life shall lose it") would keep him out of gaol, much as Shaw is kept out of it, by gaining him the reputation of a jester. The ruling classes at the time of Jesus took matters rather seriously as far as we can judge, and behaved, as is usual with humanity, like wolves when a suitable opportunity presented itself. We, on the contrary, without sacrificing our wolf-like qualities, are closer akin to hyenas: anything will furnish us with an excuse to laugh. When Shaw strikes a note of truly heartrending tragedy, we explode with laughter and exclaim: "How screamingly funny!"

Nowadays we are dreadfully afraid of superlatives. That's because we don't know our own minds. In all the best criticism it is only the superlative that matters. But our self-styled critics don't write criticisms: they write reviews. And in reviews it is only the comparative that matters. True, I have dragged Shakespeare into this essay several times, but solely because he is so generally regarded as our final standard, our convention, in art. Shakespeare did one thing that no one will ever have the chance of doing again. He took the rough, uncouth English language and moulded it into the most gorgeous, flexible medium of expression in the world. That is his grand achievement; and we may well stare at it, wonder-stricken. I suggest to our modern poets that they will save a great deal of valuable time if they give up trying to copy his method. We have a different medium now; and the world wants to be spoken to in a language it can understand. Shaw has spoken to it in that language, and because he has spoken simply, without complexity, and with none of the drossy illusions of the romancists, the sentimental critics beat their breasts and call on the various Baals of their idolatry in the proper and orthodox manner employed by all worshippers of the obsolete. But as their gods have not heard them, while Shaw's circulation continues to increase, I can only hope that future master-minds will not be utterly cast down when the critics of their day trot out the awful, and by that time venerable, works of Bernard Shaw as the final word in all things pertaining to faith and godliness.

* * * * *

Directly I jumped to the conclusion that in the "Three Plays for Puritans" we had the very quintessence of Shaw, I was all eagerness to know everything there was to be known about them. Shaw, very generously, pandered to my curiosity and wrote me a wonderful letter, which is far too good to keep to myself. What a pity no one prevailed upon Shakespeare to write an account of his masterpieces in this delightfully personal manner! I would willingly sacrifice half his plays for a letter about "Hamlet" as good as this one of Shaw's about the Puritan plays:—

"Why did it need a colossal war to make people read my books? The whole army seems to do nothing else, except when it lays down the book to fire a perfunctory shot at Jerry or to write me a letter asking me what I meant by it.

"Plays for Puritans are about as old as the century; and I do not remember very much about them. I wrote The Devil's Disciple for William Terriss, then a pet melodramatic hero at the Adelphi, which was the London home of melodrama. He and Jessie Millward and Harry Nicholls were London institutions; and they did their work extremely well. Terriss wanted to tour the world as a star. He asked me to collaborate with him in a play, the plot to be supplied by him. It was more than a plot: it was all the plots of all the melodramas he had ever played in. At the end of every act he was dragged away to penal servitude through the treachery of the beautiful devil who was the villainess of the piece; and he turned up in the next as fresh as paint without an attempt to explain this happy change in his fortune. I told him that it would be splendid for the Adelphi, but that in foreign cities, where they would have their own particular native Terriss, they would not stand melodrama from him, but would expect something like Hamlet. He put his plot in the fire (having several typed copies in his desk) and said: 'Mr. Shaw, you are right.'

"So I wrote The Devil's Disciple for him, and read it to him in Jessie Millward's flat. He listened in deep perplexity until I had nearly finished the first act, when he said 'Excuse my interrupting you; but is this an interior?' (Melodramas usually begin on the village green.) I said it was. 'Right,' he said, 'now I have it. Go on. You won't mind my interrupting you?'

"I went on. When I had read about two pages of the second act, he said, with despair in his face, 'Sorry to interrupt you again; but is *this* an interior?' I said it was; and he assured me that I had now set his mind completely at rest, and would I excuse him for interrupting me, and fire away. I fired away. When the barrage had lasted two minutes longer he had fallen into a coma so profound that Jessie and I had to carry him into the next room and give him some strong tea before he was thoroughly awake and ashamed of the failure of his effort to live up to the higher drama.

" Nothing more passed between us until he heard that Richard Mansfield had at last conquered New York with a tremendously successful melodrama, and that this was The Devil's Disciple. He sent for me hastily to discuss business with him; but before the appointment came off he was stabbed by a lunatic at the stage door of the Adelphi, which, in its old aspect as a temple of melodrama, may be said to have perished with him.

" The only other thing I remember about the play is that I wrote most of it sitting on the end of a table in the studio of a young artist named Nellie Heath, who was painting a portrait of me.

" The play was written round the scene of Dick's arrest, which had always been floating in my head as a situation for a play. Mrs. Dudgeon is a variation on Dickens's Mrs. Clennam.

" I wrote Caesar and Cleopatra for Forbes-Robertson and Mrs. Patrick Campbell when they were playing together. But it was not played by him until they had gone their several professional ways; and Cleopatra was ' created ' by Gertrude Elliott, who had already played in The Devil's Disciple with Robertson, and is now Lady Forbes-Robertson. It is what Shakespeare called a history: that is, a chronicle play; and I took the chronicle without alteration from Mommsen. I read a lot of other stuff, from Plutarch, who hated Caesar, to Warde-Fowler; but I found that Mommsen had conceived Caesar as I wished to present him, and that he told the story of the visit to Egypt like a man who believed in it, which many historians don't. I stuck nearly as closely to him as Shakespeare did to Plutarch or Holinshed. I infer from Goethe's saying that the assassination of Caesar was the worst crime in history that he also saw Caesar in the Mommsen-Shaw light. Although I was forty-four or thereabouts when I wrote the play, I now think I was a trifle too young for the job; but it was not bad for a juvenile effort.

"It may interest you, now that you are enduring the discomforts and terrors of active service, to know that when I wrote Caesar I was stumbling about on crutches with a necrosed bone in my foot that everybody believed would turn cancerous and finish me. It had been brought on by an accident occurring at the moment when I was plunging into one of those break-downs in middle life which killed Schiller and very nearly killed Goethe, and which have led to the saying that every busy man should go to bed for a year when he is forty. In trying to come downstairs on crutches before I was used to them I shot myself into empty space and fell right down through the house on to the flags, complicating the useless foot with a broken arm. It was in this condition that I wrote Caesar and Cleopatra; but I cannot see any mark of it on the play. I remember lying on the top of a cliff in the Isle of Wight with my crutches in the grass beside me, and writing the lines

> The white upon the blue above
> Is purple on the green below

as a simple memorandum of what I saw as I looked from the cliff. The Sphinx scene was suggested by a French picture of the Flight into Egypt. I never can remember the painter's name; but the engraving, which I saw in a shop window when I was a boy, of the Virgin and child asleep in the lap of a colossal Sphinx staring over a desert, so intensely still that the smoke of Joseph's fire close by went straight up like a stick, remained in the rummage basket of my memory for thirty years before I took it out and exploited it on the stage.

"Captain Brassbound's Conversion, which, like my Blanco Posnet, is an excellent religious tract, was written for Ellen Terry. When her first grandchild was born Ellen said that nobody would ever write a play for her now she was a grandmother. I said I would; and Brassbound was the result. She tried to induce Irving to produce the play. But he put his finger on the scene where Brassbound, after figuring through the first two acts as a picturesque seaman, comes in in a frock coat and top hat; and he said, 'Shaw put that in to get me laughed at.' He was perfectly right; and the stroke was so successful that when Laurence Irving 'created' the part the audience laughed for two solid minutes at him at this point. Years afterwards Ellen played it, under the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre, and then made her farewell tour through the United States in it.

"I wanted Ada Rehan to play it in America; and an agent sent her the book. She was furious at being offered a thing that was not a play at all, and in which the man, she thought, had the best part. Years later, when I read it to her (not being supposed to know anything about this early miscarriage), it threw her into a condition of extraordinary excitement, in which she exclaimed incoherently that actresses of her generation had been taught to believe that they had nothing to do but be beautiful, and that here was something quite new, quite different. She declared that she must play it. But the illness which finally killed her intervened and ended her stage career. 'I wish I dare play,' she said, 'but I cannot: I never know when I shall flop.' 'Flop away,' I said: 'we can drop the curtain till you get up again.' 'Oh, I wish I could,' she said. But she never did.

"Now that even the old professionals who still find it difficult to admit that my plays are plays have adopted it as an article of faith that I write very good parts, it is hard to believe that so many actors and actresses to whom I offered parts that were first-rate chances for them, refused them as absurd and undramatic. Omitting four or five names of artists who, being still alive, might fancy that I am reproaching them, Ada Rehan, Irving, Tree, Mansfield, Wyndham, Terriss, Alexander, Fanny Coleman, all landed themselves in this way. They were like the old Italian singers confronted with Wagner.

"As to the ideas in the plays, they are not local or temporal: they were born in me, I suppose."

* * * * *

I want to give a brief idea of the man behind these works. It is impossible to convey a true impression of his vivid charm. Anything in the nature of nervousness with him is quite out of the question. He puts one completely at ease the moment he meets one. He has more than his share of vitality. He is very jerky in movement, though his gestures are frank, full and free. As he sits talking, he perpetually crosses, uncrosses and recrosses his legs, shoves his hands into his pockets, pulls them out again, by turns sits back and then up in his chair, bends forward, stretches backwards with feet right out to the full length of his body—altogether leaving the impression that he can't sit still for twenty consecutive seconds if his life were to be forfeit for not doing so. He is a full six feet in height, very spare in frame, with white hair and beard—the latter narrowing towards the tip—an exceedingly high forehead, head flat at the back, and bristling white moustache. A most expressive, though not actually mobile, face, very pleasant if at times the least bit sardonic, very much alive. Like his prose, his conversation is emphatic, though it is relieved by a soft, charming voice and a slight, fascinating Irish brogue. He talks quickly, with now and then a sort of half-laugh, and his light eyes help to complete that sense of supreme pleasantness about his whole personality which is quite incommunicable by picture or pen. His humour is irresistible, and his manner is so winning that an audience will rock with laughter in sheer delight at being insulted by him so charmingly. At rehearsal, too, he puts his artists through their paces in a way that would disarm and pacify the grumpiest of dyspeptics!

I find it difficult to speak of the man himself without covering my page with exclamation marks. As a member of society, he is apparently a bundle of all the virtues and none of the vices. And yet it is a mistake to imagine anyone, even Shaw, as perfect.

As I see him, he has one very serious, almost disabling, defect; and one unexampled, superman-like virtue. The first is due to his unnatural seriousness; the second is due to his unfailing kindliness. Fortunately I can give illuminative examples of both.

His defect can be summarized very clearly in the fact that he once took the trouble to criticize that masterpiece of merriment, "The Importance of being Earnest," calling it sinister and heartless. Now the man who can sit down and seriously diagnose such a work has got something the matter with him. It is a sort of literary measles, and in Shaw's case it seems to be chronic. He is able to enjoy the lighter things, just as the invalid enjoys chicken and grapes, but he can't forget the heavier things, any more than the invalid forgets the measles. He doesn't enjoy for the sake of enjoyment; he appears to enjoy for the sake of sorrow.

Shaw's peculiar virtue lies in his absolute freedom from envy, pettiness and vanity. Practically all the worries and calamities that afflict nations and individuals spring from these three things. I am in a position to record a noble instance of Shaw's immunity from the ills that beset the rest of humanity, even its leaders, by placing his conduct side by side with that of two of his greatest contemporaries—and as many others as you like to mention.

Sometime during 1916, when all the world (including myself) was in khaki, Frank Harris sent me several copies of a book he had just issued in America. It was his "Life of Oscar Wilde." Previous to this Harris had delivered, in the preface to his play on Shakespeare, a fairly snorting and, I believe, quite unjust attack on Shaw. Anyone but Shaw would have been furious about it; but Shaw had turned the other cheek and written by way of reply a magnificent eulogy of Harris in his preface to "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets."

Shortly after the outbreak of war Harris went to America and promptly wrote some absurd articles about Shaw, which he called a "portrait." I cannot account for his action except on the rather miserable ground that the American public like reading stupid things about eminent people, and Harris was in fairly low water at the time.

Anyhow, the books turned up and Harris asked me to send copies to various famous people over here and get their opinions on it. All the people who weren't in khaki at the time (I mean of course the over-military-age crowd) loathed Harris like poison because he was repeating opinions he had always professed and constantly stated during the twenty odd years he had spent in England before the war broke out. These people, you see, had just discovered how very obnoxious a person can be who holds to his opinions through thick and thin. Well, I received quite a lot of insults and cold shoulders in my efforts on Harris's behalf. Among others, Mr. Joseph Conrad wrote in the third person (which until then I had assumed was the right only of monarchs and editors, with the possible alternative on state occasions of the first person plural) returning the book. He informed me that he was glad of having the opportunity to send back the work which reached him some time ago. "The subject does not interest him and with the writer he is out of sympathy on this and on more serious matters." Fancy that now!

Mr. H. G. Wells was more explicit, and, which was very nice of him, called me "Dear Sir"—with capitals, just like that! He went on to thank me for the copy of Frank Harris's book on Wilde and for the magazine containing his "lies about poor old W—— L—— and Conrad." Neither altered his opinion of Mr. Harris in the slightest degree. (Note that "Mr."!) He thought my letter rather impertinent but quite well meaning. He *knew* Harris. . . . My letter, by the way, was simply an urgent request that he should talk and write about the book.

I was stung several times in the hornet's nest I had thus put my head into, and was forced to shed several cherished illusions relative to our noble army of artist-thinkers.

So I poured my woes out to Shaw in a letter, to which he replied: "Frank's present tack of describing to the Americans how he discovered Wells, Kipling, Conrad, myself, and other neglected geniuses, and rescued them from obscurity, is no doubt quite sincere; for he probably believes that America was discovered at the moment when he first landed there; but if these writers refuse to take it good-humouredly as I do, you cannot reasonably quarrel with them on that account."

The way Shaw himself hit back at Harris, with infinitely greater provocation than the others, was as follows: he sat down, wrote a letter about his personal meetings with Wilde and about Harris's book, and then, discovering that the letter was almost as long as one of the prefaces to his own plays, calmly informed Harris that he could, if he liked, use it as an appendix to any future edition of the work he decided to publish. This astounding act of generosity, unique in literary history if all the circumstances are carefully taken into account, helped Harris to an exceptional public prestige in the States, put him firmly on his legs, and sent his book into as many editions as even popular authors only occasionally dream about in their most sanguine moments.

* * * * *

I owe an apology to Bernard Shaw, because he told me not to waste my time writing about him. But I couldn't help it. It had to be done. I had been brooding on the matter for several years, and I knew I wouldn't be happy until it was over and finished with. But as a very sound guide to future would-be Shavians or would-be anyone else, I shall here quote his excellent advice:

" Neither I nor any man of my generation takes the smallest interest in you, or can be anything to you but a snare. You must deal with the world as you find it, not as I found it. Of all literary bores and failures the most hopeless are the Don Quixotes who make Dulcineas of their pet authors and rush about breaking lances for them instead of doing honest original work. What do you suppose I should have been if I had spent my life pestering people about Ruskin and Carlyle, Mill and Herbert Spencer, instead of about Shaw? It is true that I wrote books about Wagner and Ibsen; but they were virtually my contemporaries; and what I called attention to was not their music-dramas and plays, but a modern philosophy of life of which they, like myself, were exponents.

"Your bread and butter will never be safe until, in the language of the trench and the home, you allude to me contemptuously as 'a —— old back number.' Don't talk about me, or write about me, or about Frank Harris, or about anybody over forty except the dead, and not too much about them.

"I really tremble for your future when I find you still going on exactly as you did before you got torn up by the roots and planted in the city of Haroun al Raschid."

## II

## SIR HERBERT TREE

AT the age of eighteen I was literally hypnotized by Tree. His theatre seemed to me a veritable temple of all the arts, and I used to dream over the hours spent there. As for the man himself, I thought him the most wonderful thing that had ever happened. Imagine, then, the trepidation with which I lingered around a certain pillar box in Hampstead, a letter in my hand which I dared not post, stamped, and addressed to H. Beerbohm Tree Esq., His Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket, S.W. In it I asked him if he would let me " walk on " in one of his productions. But I had no spur to prick the sides of my intent. The letter was never posted. An unexpected legacy relieved me from the drudgery of city life, and I roamed for a year or two. Mexico, the United States, Canada and the West Indies between them relieved me of my legacy, and then for the first time I touched the hem of my hero's costume.

I was working, or pretending to work, in Brighton, and the idea seized me that I would like to see Tree's Hamlet again, after a long interval, during one of his annual festivals. So I wired to him: " Can you play Hamlet in a business-like manner next Thursday so as to enable me to catch midnight train from Victoria ?" His answer came back: "Cannot alter my conception of the part to fit midnight train but will cut a scene if you'll run to Victoria." I agreed to run and he to cut—someone else's scene, of course.

After that I met him. It was during his famous production of "Henry VIII." I wrote to say I wanted to begin my stage career under his banner. He replied: "Come and see me, but don't be too optimistic. You should have independent means or relations with Court Circles to be successful on the stage nowadays. If you have the former, why go on the stage ? If the latter, the kings and queens of real life should satisfy you ; though I admit we can give you the romantic article better than they, because a cardboard crown is more artistic than a top hat."

Thus it came about that I was ushered into the mighty presence of Cardinal Wolsey one night during the performance of "Henry VIII." It was an immense moment for me. Wolsey-Tree was sitting at the desk in his outer dressing-room as I entered. He rose, shook hands, said "How do you do ? Take a seat," and sat down again. I took a seat. He leaned back in his, and stared hard at me for about two minutes without speaking. I became fretful. Suddenly he said: "Don't bite your nails. It's a sign of mental stagnation." I ventured a remark about one of the pictures in his room. He apparently didn't hear me speak. Another long silence. Then he broke out: "Don't suck your thumb. It signifies lack of stamina." This rather irritated me. I asked whether he would like to write me a prescription ? He immediately took up his pen and wrote some words on a slip of paper. Then he rose, handed me the paper, murmured " Come again after the next act," took me a few steps along the corridor outside his room, and pushed me through a door that opened into the dress circle. I looked at the paper and read the following :

> DISEASE : Want of philosophic calm, typically modern.
> CURE : One performance of *Henry VIII*, to be taken weekly.
> H. B. T.

At the end of the act I found my way back into his dressing-room.

" Who are you ? " he asked the moment I entered.

I told him who I was.

" What do you want ? " he demanded.

" Surely you can't have forgotten that——" I began.

" Answer my question," he broke in ; " I forget everything I don't wish to remember."

I now realized that I was dealing either with a maniac or with a man who carried his profession into his private life. I decided in favour of the latter, and the conversation continued in this strain :

ME.—I want a job.

TREE.—Can you speak German ?

ME.—No ; but does one have to speak German to go on the stage ?

TREE.—It would certainly be useful if you wanted to go on the German stage.

ME.—I don't.

Tree.—Well, that settles it, doesn't it? Can you speak French?

Me.—Yes.

Tree.—Fluently?

Me.—No.

Tree.—What a pity!

Me.—Why?

Tree.—Because one should always swear in a foreign language at rehearsals.

Me.—Is there any necessity to swear at all?

Tree.—No necessity, but a great relief. Are you fond of your wife?

Me.—I haven't got one.

Tree.—Yes, but are you fond of her?

Me.—How the dickens can I be fond of a wife I haven't got?

Tree.—Ah, I hadn't thought of that. . . . Have you read much?

Me.—It depends upon what you call reading much.

Tree.—I mean the perusal of a vast quantity of words printed on paper and bound in books.

Me.—Yes, yes, of course I knew you meant that; but to what class of reading do you refer?

Tree.—Oh, the kind that teaches facts and figures.

Me.—I know nothing of facts and figures. They don't interest me.

Tree.—That's right, quite right. Beware of the encyclopaedias. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but a lot ruins one's digestion.

At this moment Mr. Henry Dana, Tree's manager, came into the room, and for several minutes Tree had to wrestle with some figures in a ledger that

Mr. Dana had brought with him. I sat and watched him. He kept turning the leaves backwards and forwards without the haziest idea of what was being explained to him, and now and then he would put his finger on some possibly conspicuous figure and say: "What's that?"—rather in the way a baby might exclaim: "Oh, look at that lovely big one there!" After a while Mr. Dana left, and Tree was called for his next act. He told me to return when it was over, and then left me. Just as I was disappearing into the dress circle, however, he came trotting back along the corridor, dragged me back into his room and, placing his mouth against my ear, whispered, "Have you ever been to Jerusalem?" I replied that I had not. "How interesting!" he remarked as he drifted back down the passage.

The next act was the last, and when it was over I watched him removing his make-up and changing. Meanwhile he continued to murmur eccentric nothings. There was no apparent connection in his train of thought; and as he didn't pay the slightest attention to anything I thought fit to say, I will just record his monologue without my own interpellations:

"How did you like the play? Wonderful production, isn't it? Have you read my brochure on 'Henry VIII'? Quite a charming little essay. I wrote it during my holiday. It's always useful to have a job on hand during one's holiday; it saves one from bores who insist on interrupting one's dreams with tedious prattle about politics or mixed bathing. Did you ever see old Irving? A strange personality, but hard . . . hard. . . . I couldn't get on with him at all. Quite unlike his two boys, Harry and Laurence. Such nice lads; I like 'em both. . . . Don't forget to remember me to your wife. . . . See that letter? It's from a girl who wants to go on the stage. She writes: 'The enclosed photo will show you how attractive I am. I also send a photo of my aunt, who has the toothache.' . . . The English public doesn't really like Shakespeare; it prefers football. . . . Shakespearean scholars say I'm wrong in tempting people to come to the theatre and giving them a spectacle instead of Shakespeare. But I prefer a spectacle on the stage to spectacles in the audience. . . . Some day you will tell me how it was you didn't go to Jerusalem. It must have been a delightful experience—not to have gone after all. . . . Winkles!—yes, that's a fine occupation—picking winkles out of shells on a frosty night in Pimlico. (Are they in shells, by the way?) Take my advice: don't go on the stage—pick winkles out of shells. . . . Do you believe in God? Perhaps you aren't old enough. The reason old people believe in God is because they've given up believing in anything else, and one can't exist without faith in something. Besides, after sixty, one hasn't the vitality to combat the instincts of the majority. God is a sort of burglar. As a young man you knock him down; as an old man, you try to conciliate him because he may knock you down. Moral: don't grow old. With age comes caution, which is another name for cowardice, and both are the effect of a guilty conscience. Whatever else you do in life, don't cultivate a conscience. Without a conscience a man may never be said to grow old. This is an age of very old young men. . . . Never neglect an opportunity to play leap-frog; it is the best of all games, and, unlike the terribly serious and conscientious pastimes of modern youth, will never become professionalized. . . . Have you ever been in love ? That is the greatest thing in life. Don't confuse love with matrimony. Love keeps you young, matrimony makes you old. Love should never be allowed to disturb the excellent economic foundation of the domestic hearth. Love is more precious than life; but a silver wedding speaks for itself. . . . Why is it that we have to go to Germany for our grease paints . . . ."

During this little homily, Tree floated to and from his inner dressing-room, a sort of washing sanctum, in a state of complete uncertainty as to where he was, who he was talking to, and what he was supposed to be doing. It was entirely due to the ministrations of his dresser that he managed to complete his toilet at all. Occasionally he would ejaculate little expressions of annoyance at not finding what he wanted the moment he wanted it. These would often occur in the most unexpected places. For instance, he followed up his query "Do you believe in God ?" with "Where's that damned stud ?" His movements struck me as rather feminine, in particular the way he walked. He always gave the impression of drifting, sometimes even of floating, from one place to another; his legs appeared to move from the knees, not from the hips. He had a fine head, a brow both tall and broad, and the most alert, expressive eyes I have ever seen in my life. Quite blue they were, but startlingly keen and probing. The soul of Tree looked through those eyes—at one moment dull and dreamy, at another flashing and joyous. But whether in repose or alive with light, they were always extraordinary. No one who met Tree is ever likely to forget his eyes. Another memorable thing about him was his voice. It was a soft, purring, nasal voice, so much a part of himself that dozens of the funniest sayings attributed to him are only amusing to those who remember the tone of voice in which he would have said them. It was far more pleasant off the stage than on it. When acting, especially in Shakespeare, he frequently forced it. This accentuated its nasal quality and killed its dreamy, haunting notes.

It has been said that Tree was a great wit and humorist. But this is only half true. His wit was studied, not spontaneous, and most of his humour was just personal mannerism—his way of saying a thing, rather than the thing said. He had a fantastic and humorous personality. Once, during a rehearsal of "Othello," he made Laurence Irving, a naturally serious (almost lugubrious) person, roar with laughter for several minutes together by simply saying to the stage-manager: "Oh, for God's sake stop people from passing in and out of that door! They look like the horrible objects that glide to and fro somewhere at the bottom of the sea."

Nor had Tree any touch of eloquence. His speeches were halting and not seldom pathetically self-conscious. The attempt to be witty at all costs was painfully obvious. And when the *bon mot* failed to come off, as it usually did, he'd often labour away at the next with blithe indifference to the feelings of those well-wishers who had been polite enough to snigger at the last. This epigrammatic pose, modelled of course on Oscar Wilde, was not in any sense a sign of insincerity. It was simply his cap and bells, the inevitable surface-expression of his whimsical temperament. Actually, Tree was intensely keen on his art, knit up with it body and soul, and expressed his mind very honestly and forcibly about it whenever called upon in public to do so. I certainly remember an occasion when he informed his audience that even though they might be pleased with his work, it didn't follow that he should feel pleased with it himself—thus asserting the independence of the artist and defending his most sacred right to unfettered self-expression.

To the average man Tree always appeared more like a big baby than a serious and successful member of the community. Everyone knows the story of how an actor, whom he had known well in earlier days, came to see him during his performance of Fagin. Tree looked at him hard, without a glimpse of recognition, for a minute or so; after which the actor, temporarily non-plussed, held out his hand and said: "Surely you remember me, Mr. Tree? I am K——." "Ah, yes, of course," replied Tree, "you must forgive me; I didn't recognize you in my disguise." Some people took offence at this kind of thing, and hated Tree as a poseur. But it was only his fun. He loved, Puck-like, to watch the effects of his own impudence. There was not an atom of real hardness in his nature.

Tree was invariably at his best during rehearsals. His inventive faculties then came into full play. He showed, times without number, that he could play all the parts better than the actors who were cast for them. By a fleeting gesture, a glance, a tone of the voice, a physical pose, he could bring a character before one with the most astounding vividness. It didn't matter in the least whether the characters were tragic, comic, fantastical, light, heavy, intense, rhetorical—all came to him as easily as walking downstairs or drinking champagne. In " A Midsummer Night's Dream," when Mr. Arthur Bourchier was playing Bottom, again and again Tree managed to body forth the very soul of the immortal Weaver, and we all wondered why on earth he was letting Bourchier burlesque the part like a circus clown. After dozens of attempts, he gave up the job of trying to convert Bourchier into Bottom, and then taught the rest of the cast so well that not even Bourchier was able to persuade the audience that Samuel Pepys was right in calling the play a piece of buffoonery. The activity of Lady Tree at rehearsals used sometimes to get on his nerves ; her exuberance and affectation worried him. During the " Dream " rehearsals she kept fussing him about the fairies : should they be masculine or feminine ? At last he turned on her : " Oh, make them neuter. Only so can they be at peace."

Occasionally, as a rule when he was rehearsing a tragedy, Tree would become quite unbearable. In " Macbeth " he once did the banquet scene twelve times in succession, cursing everybody at odd moments throughout the ten hours or more which he took to do it. On these occasions he used to drink fairly heavily to keep himself going ; and the more he drank, the more sullen and irritable he became.

It was during the run of " Macbeth " that he put on a play by Zangwill called " The War God " for two matinées only. The rehearsals were more than trying. Zangwill, who I believe had quite a good opinion of his blank verse, was roundly informed that a great deal of his pet poetry was "mere journalism " and had to be cut out. And one actor of considerable standing was ordered out of the theatre for being " a bloody old woman." (As a matter of fact, he *had* been rather a nuisance.)

After I joined the company at His Majesty's Theatre, I saw a good deal of Tree both off and on the stage; and the fundamental simplicity of his character was revealed to me over and over again. He had a child-like love of flattery, but was much too clever to drink it all in. As I admired him on the whole more than any other actor I had seen, I was able quite honestly to give him all the praise that was good for him, and this made him very susceptible to my criticism whenever it came. He was really quite cut up when I told him he wasn't suited to Othello, and he began a lengthy disquisition to the effect that it was his finest Shakespearean performance—because, apparently, it made him sweat more than any of the others! He was annoyed when I said one day that Sargent's sketch, though a brilliant likeness, made him look much younger than he was, and for about an hour afterwards he kept returning to the subject with: " You don't know me as well as Sargent does," or " You ought to study the art of expression," or " Go and see an oculist, my friend."

Once he gave me his opinion of the dramatic critics. "There are," he said, "three kinds of dramatic critics. There are those who say the drama is going to the devil, those who say it's ascending to heaven, and those who halt between two opinions. So far as my own theatre is concerned I am inclined to agree with the second class. Of course not one of them really knows what he is talking about. They all make statements that the intelligent public disprove. And it's the public, not the critics, who have kept Shakespeare alive. If it were possible to put on an unknown play by Shakespeare and give its author's name as John Smith, there'd not be a single critic in London with sufficient discernment to spot the poet. In Germany things are different. There the critics possess true culture and literary ability. But here I sometimes think they've sent the football reporter to our first nights instead of the dramatic critic. Perhaps it's the same person, you say? Yes, there's something in that. I must try to find out. Their extraordinary preference for what they call virile acting certainly bears out your suggestion. What's wrong with the English theatre is not the drama or the actor or the public, but the dramatic critic. Personally I have nothing but praise for the social qualities of our critics. They are delightful fellows. No words could do justice to their personal charm, their generosity, their sincerity, their patriotism, their domestic virtues—and their unfathomable ignorance!"

I spent a curious hour or two with Tree one night not long after I joined him. I was leaving the theatre at the close of the performance when suddenly I heard his voice on the stairs behind me:

"Where are you going?" "Home to bed," I replied. "Don't be rash," said he; "young and yet careful." Then he gripped my arm, hailed a taxi, pushed me inside, got in himself, and slammed the door. The driver left his seat, opened the door and asked where we wanted to go.

"That is not the sort of question that should be put to a gentleman at this time of night," rejoined Tree.

"Come orf it," snapped the driver.

"He means 'off,' using the term in a metaphorical sense," Tree murmured.

"Are you going to tell me where you want to go, or shall I fetch a bobby?" demanded the man.

"Whither thou goest, we will go," quoted Tree; "but where thou lodgest we certainly don't intend to lodge." Then, seeing the man was getting angry, he added: "Drive us slowly round and round the West End until we tell you to stop. If you see a man in green trousers, a top hat and spotted waistcoat, blow your horn three times and increase your speed."

The driver, not altogether certain whether he was indulging a privileged lunatic or dealing with a Scotland Yard detective, returned to his seat and started off. Tree lay back in his corner, crossed his legs and talked. Now and then I said something, to which he paid no more attention than a grunt, and his purrings practically amounted to a soliloquy, of which I give here only those parts I remember accurately. The dots denote, according to their number, short and long pauses. I should add that the gentleman to whom he refers so frequently had just been hung for murdering his wife:

"I used to believe the world was round. Nowadays I am sure it is flat. . . . . Poor old Crippen! . . . . Why? you naturally ask." (I hadn't, but it didn't matter.) "I don't know. Possibly because I can't believe that God plays football with the planetary system. The idea is outrageous. It is horrible that a man of your intelligence should support it." (I hadn't uttered a word in its favour, but that was neither here nor there.) "You have what I may call a Crystal Palace mind. I don't mean to suggest that your mind is as clear as crystal. It isn't. No Crystal Palace minds are. That is the paradox of the Victorian era. . . . . . . . . . . . Poor old Crippen! . . . . . . . . . . Don't talk so much. Talking hinders thought. I always think aloud, and I can't stand people talking while I'm thinking at the top of my voice. Do you really imagine that anything you say is of the smallest importance? Your tongue was given you to hold it. . . . . Poor old Crippen! . . . . . . . . . . . . Once, many years ago, while I was witnessing my own impersonation of Hamlet—a beautiful performance—the thought struck me that I would, some time or another, produce one of Shakespeare's plays. But alas!—don't interrupt me—all our ideals escape us. Besides it wouldn't be fair to Sidney Lee and the rest of the would-be Elizabethans, none of whom would have anything to grumble about if I stuck to the 'true and perfect coppie'. Their occupation would be gone, and one cannot trifle with the problem of the Unemployable. . . . . . . . Does your eye ever roll in a fine frenzy? No, of course not. You would be in Hanwell if it did. As I said before, you have a Crippen Palace mind. . . . Poor old Crystal! . . ."

At this point Tree lapsed into silence for about ten minutes. Then he commenced to murmur, but I only caught one phrase—"She probably deserved it"—referable no doubt to the late Mrs. Crippen. Then silence again. I began to feel sleepy and had got into a sort of nodding condition when the taxi stopped and the driver opened the door violently. "'Ow long's this going on for?" he shouted. Tree, without moving, said to me: "Give him something on account."

"I'm awfully sorry," I replied, "but I've only got half-a-crown on me."

"My God!" exclaimed Tree; "fancy inviting a man to go for a ride and then expecting him to pay for it."

ME.—But, Sir Herbert, it was you who invited me.

TREE.—Yes, I know. I regard my behaviour as perfectly scandalous.

ME.—Oh, I beg your pardon.

TREE.—You do not beg in vain.

DRIVER.—I'd like you two gentlemen's names and addresses.

TREE.—I know what! He shall have seats. Yes, he shall have as many seats as he likes. He shall have *rows* of seats all to himself. He shall have tier upon tier of boxes and circles. We shall build a theatre to hold countless seats—and he shall have them all. . . . . . Poor old Crippen! . .

ME—(*to Driver*). Will you please drive us back to His Majesty's Theatre. My name wouldn't interest you, but this is Sir Herbert Tree—a great man with curious habits.

DRIVER.—Right you are, sir. I've 'eard of 'im.

We must have been somewhere in St. James's during this incident, because I remember driving at an unholy rate through King Street, across the Square and along Charles Street. We narrowly missed another taxi in Waterloo Place, which brought Tree up with a jerk and an exclamation: "I'm sure he didn't mean to do it"—which may have been inspired either by the driver or Dr. Crippen. At the theatre he managed to borrow some money for the taxi man, and then I left him. His last words were: "Good night, my boy. . . . Why in heaven's name can't they use the Lethal Chamber?"

Tree's chief failing, which constituted no little of his charm, was this whimsical inappropriateness that I have tried to illustrate. One was never perfectly certain where sincerity began and absurdity left off. He undoubtedly adopted a pose, but a pose may be just as much a part of a man as a temper. It is wrong to call a man insincere just because he poses. We all pose, more or less. With Tree, at any rate, the pose was the man. Without it, he would not have been Tree. Let me give two characteristical instances. They both show him in his habit as he lived.

An actor of my acquaintance, having heard that Tree was very interested in the art of make-up and always noticed those of his company who took pains to get the right effect, decided to give his imagination full play, and arrived on the stage at the first dress rehearsal in a quite masterly disguise.

Tree spotted him from afar and drifted towards him. The following conversation then took place:

TREE.—My God! How did you do it?

ACTOR (*immensely elated*).—Oh, I—well, I did it.

TREE.—The result of life-long study—what?

ACTOR.—Oh, hardly that, sir, but of course a good deal.

TREE.—I've never seen such shadow effects—wonderful! But surely, *surely* someone must have helped you? You couldn't have done it entirely out of your own head?

ACTOR.—It's very gratifying to hear you talk like that, sir. Yes, I did it all, quite on my own. "Alone I did it"—Ha, ha! . .

TREE.—A wit, too. Very good. Ha, ha, ha!

ACTOR.—Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

TREE.—Quite so. Ha! It's amazing. Let me see you in profile. Yes, yes. Astonishing. Now the back view please. Most remarkable. No, no; don't turn round; the back view couldn't be improved upon. The 'hair' effect is quite unique. How did you manage it?

ACTOR.—But that's my own hair, sir.

TREE.—Oh, I see. Your own hair? Yes, yes. The old quarrel between nature and art. Now you may turn round. My God! What a face! A miracle. . . . . But, I say, you aren't going on like that, are you? . . . . . . . . .

All this was rather cruel on the poor actor, but it probably did him a lot of good in the long run, and he tells the story now against himself without any spice of malice against Tree.

The other instance is still more typical of the man.

He was lunching one day with a friend at the Carlton. Suddenly he noticed someone lunching alone at another table. He called the waiter and said: "My compliments to Mr. Henry Arthur Jones—the gentleman over there—and will he very kindly come and speak to me for a minute?" The waiter did as he was asked, and returned to say that Sir Herbert was mistaken—the gentleman was not Mr. Henry Arthur Jones.

"Yes, yes," said Tree, "very funny, very funny indeed: he always did like his little joke. But this is important. Please tell Mr. Jones that I would feel very grateful if he will behave seriously for once. I am most anxious to speak to him."

The waiter again approached the solitary gentleman and gave Tree's message. Again he returned and said: "The gentleman is not joking at all. He says he is quite serious and he is not Mr. Henry Arthur Jones." Tree dismissed the waiter with a laugh which implied that Mr. Jones was incorrigible and went on with his lunch.

The solitary gentleman finished his meal before the others, and on his way out stopped at Tree's table. Addressing Tree with some little heat, he said: "I don't see why you should insist on knowing me. Surely it was enough to point out your mistake once? My name is not Jones."

"Do you mean to tell me quite seriously that you are not Mr. Henry Arthur Jones?" queried Tree.

"I do, sir!" shouted the other.

"Then you were quite right to deny it," mildly returned Sir Herbert as he continued his lunch.

I have said that Tree's wit was laboured, but sometimes he did say the most delightful things with apparent spontaneity. For example, when he first saw "Chu Chin Chow" in 1916 he summed it up supremely in a phrase: "It's more navel than millinery," which was worth more as a criticism alone than all the columns both pro and con that had appeared in the papers.

The last time I saw him was, curiously, the last time I saw George Alexander and H. B. Irving. It was in the autumn of 1916 and Tree had crossed over from America for a week or two in England. As President of the Actors' Committee for the Shakespeare Tercentenary Performance he came to the St. James's Theatre one day for the purpose of making me a presentation from the Committee for my services as Secretary. Alexander and Irving were the only other members of the Committee present. All three died while I was serving abroad.

Tree asked me how I liked the Army. I replied in suitable terms. "Do you want to go to the front?" he asked. "Does anyone *not* want to?" I countered. "I don't" he answered emphatically, and then, as an afterthought, "at least I shan't pretend I do." This was a most refreshing statement in those days when all the old men in the country went about canting their hypocritical twaddle: "If only we were younger!"

Tree then described, with much gesticulation, the inventions that were shortly to be used against the Zeppelins. I remember he spoke of some astounding things that our airmen were to carry, referring to them as "great tentacles of fire"—the entire idea having no doubt originated, and elaborated itself, in his own mind.

Next, H. B. Irving had a yarn (straight from

Whitehall, of course) relating to Lord Kitchener's death. Kitchener had apparently received a telegram a day or two before he started for Russia which ran: "Shall Henry enter the London Academy next December?" He couldn't make head or tail of it; but shortly after the ship which carried him had been sunk off the Shetlands, someone discovered that the first letter of each word in the telegram spelt the ominous name. "Dirty work, I should think," summed up H. B.

"I must take a copy of that, Harry," exclaimed Tree, with all the child's interest in a new toy.

That was his abiding charm. He never grew up.

* * * * *

And now I want to say a few words about Tree's work and position as an artist. He was, beyond any cavil or question, the last of the great actor-managers. With him a system died. It was a system with a few fine virtues and some serious faults. He was, perhaps, the best possible example of both. By its virtues we were his debtors for a few unforgettable impersonations, some astonishingly fine productions, and a really big personality. By its faults we were his creditors for some terrible examples of bad casting, not a few atrociously poor plays—staged for the sole purpose of providing him with fat character parts—and an occasionally frightful expenditure of lime-light. His death raised the interesting question of how far individualism may benefit art or how far socialism might redeem it. Undoubtedly his best performances would have suffered from outside interference; undoubtedly, too, outside interference would have saved us from his worst performances. And the same can be said with equal truth of the plays he produced.

I have already stated at the beginning of this essay that at a very impressionable age Tree's art exercised considerable influence over me. In 1906, fresh from school, I saw him for the first time in Stephen Phillips's rhetorical masterpiece, "Nero." That was the first big artistic moment of my life. Unsophisticated though I was, I think I realized that Tree was unsuited to the part, except in make-up and general conception. As with Macbeth of a later date, his idea of the thing could not have been bettered: the execution only was wanting. Still, "Nero" was a great show, taken on the whole, and my imagination, half famished by the paralysing curriculum of an English public school, awoke to a new world—a world of poetry, music and beauty.

Then I began to lunch in the City on a cup of coffee and a roll and butter, so as to save my money for the pit of His Majesty's Theatre. I saw practically all his famous impersonations, in revivals or otherwise, and a large number of his infamous impersonations as well. The common notion of Tree's best pieces of acting was never right. He was much too fantastical in such popular parts as Falstaff, Demetrius, Malvolio, Fagin, Shylock, Svengali, Micawber, Zakkuri. They were brilliantly clever caricatures, intellectually great caricatures—what you will—but not real living characters. His performances of them merely went to show that caricatures can amuse and interest as much as their prototypes. In my opinion Tree's Malvolio was a much more entertaining person than Shakespeare's, and his Shylock made a far more majestic figure than the poet's "periwig-pated fellow." However, this was not strictly legitimate work, and bardoloters may be forgiven for having considered it a crime and Tree a most offensive criminal. Then, too, he caricatured those two already excellent caricatures, Fagin and Svengali, and, needless to say, got more fun out of them than their creators ever dreamt of putting into them. In fact it is not too much to say that just as his half-brother, Max Beerbohm, is the greatest of pictorial caricaturists, so Tree was the greatest of histrionic caricaturists. He converted the peculiarities of the original into the characteristics of the copy. Very rarely did he subdue this Puck-like element in his work, but we owed Colonel Newcome, Beethoven, Paragot and Richard II to those rare occasions. Tree did not read Shakespeare by flashes of lightning—he usually read him by flashes of lime-light—but as Richard II he read him by flashes of insight. He used the X-ray of sympathy and imagination.

One can but treat actors by comparison with contemporaries of their cloth, if I may so term it. "They are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time" Hamlet tells us. The finer spirits among them are the priests of the literary gods. True, with the help of the gramophone and the cinematograph a sort of pale understudy may be immortalized, but the charm (if there is any), the personality, make their final exeunt with the owner. A comparison with the rest of the stage celebrities of his day shows us that Tree had not the virility of Lewis Waller, the classical naturalness and unequalled elocution of Forbes Robertson. Tree's Hamlet, for example, was a romantic idealization of the commoner things, the very absence of which distinguishes the real Hamlet from the pettifogging world around him. Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet was the only possible Hamlet in conception and the only thinkable Hamlet in execution—a flawless performance. Again, Tree was utterly incapable of the pit-popular heroic parts in which Waller excelled. Tree's Hotspur must have been quite painful to watch, and his Antony was too fearsome to capture a real mob. As Iago he would have swamped any Othello on the stage, but he chose to play Othello and missed one of the chances of his life. This was a great pity, for he might have established an excellent tradition by turning Iago into a figure of farce.

His extraordinary faculty for caricature was the direct outcome of a restless, inventive mind. He was never contented, always wanting to improve, to build up, a part. Then, when he became tired, or when his fertility was momentarily exhausted, he used calmly to " walk through " the performance and pull faces or make jokes at other people on the stage. When he was not flattering the public with his best, he was insulting the public with his worst. He simply couldn't help it; and this strange behaviour was certainly due to the appalling effect of long runs on a highly sensitive and artistic temperament. He should never have been allowed to play a part for more than three consecutive performances.

Tree's personality was all-dominant whenever he chose to exercise it. It was just as fantastical off the stage as on it, and just as wilful. The best part he ever played was Herbert Beerbohm Tree in the play of that name. He was his own best mimic.

He was a perpetual caricature of himself. He always took possession of a place or a number of people in a weird, childlike way. At the Coronation Gala Performance in 1911 he acted Antony in the Forum scene from "Julius Caesar," and it was arranged that Granville Barker should produce the scene. Nearly every actor of any importance on the British stage and a large number (like myself) of no importance whatever appeared in this "star turn" as the crowd of citizens. In honour of so famous an occasion, Barker spent many sleepless nights (so I imagine) in preparing "a book of the words." This turned out to be a pamphlet of two dozen pages containing the movements of everybody concerned at each point in the proceedings—e.g. "X365 strikes his breast and moves up stage to left centre, where he is met by Y39 and Z123, who condole with him," or something of that nature. Altogether a noteworthy enterprise. After two or three desperate rehearsals, the effect of which should have whitened the hair of any ordinarily constituted man, Enter Tree. Within a very few minutes Barker's booklets were considerably below par and Tree was dominating the entire assembly with eagle glance and outstretched arm. "I will sway them," he declaimed: "the movements they make shall be dictated by the magic of my utterance; they shall all weep when I weep, all execrate when I execrate, and be silenced as one man by the uplifting of my hand"—or words to that effect.

And so it was. And so it always was. Quite politely and quite firmly Tree invariably did exactly what he wanted to do. But he was a dreamer, too, with all the dreamer's elusive charm and changing fancy. It was the dreamer in him, the poet, that brought Richard II to life so vividly and naturally, making him infinitely human and lovable, and yet a spirit from the spheres, haunting, wistful, appealing.

London has not been the same place to me since Tree's death. A link with my youth has snapped. The great theatre which he loved and lived in will remain, but the genius which made it great has gone, and in going has bereft it of a certain nobility and glamour quite unlike the temporary distinctions of other theatres.

In gratitude for some sacred benefits, which can no more be repeated or described than past moments of one's spiritual growth, I have here tried to keep the memory of these passing things, now alas! fading away—so soon to become the pale shadows of a dream.

## III

## SIR FRANCIS GALTON

THE most difficult art in the world is the art of understanding your fellow man. Sympathy has to be almost abnormally developed in order to do so. And you must begin the study by trying to understand yourself. In literature, the paucity of great biographies is sufficient evidence of the difficulty, and the negligible quantity of great autobiographies throws a flood of light on the significance of this.

Unfortunately, a biographer usually limits his work to the record of his subject's achievements and leaves out the very thing his readers are clamouring for, viz., the heart and soul interest, the personality, that is behind everything. Thus we are invariably left to discover the Man in this or that tit-bit of scandal or in the gossip of two or three brief sketches by some of his friends.

Sir Francis Galton's contemporaries have told us very little about him, and the majority have of course gone the way of all flesh. It seems to me a pity that no one should have taken the trouble to write a personal sketch of him, as distinct from the very long and very official (that is, scientific) " Life and Labours " by his friend, Professor Karl Pearson. His influence will, I am convinced, increase with the years, and it is certain that our children will want to know more about him personally than we ourselves have yet been told.

At any rate I shall try in a few paragraphs to give an idea of the Man, Galton, and leave his works to take care of themselves. I can't do much harm by it and I may do a little good.

I first got to know him (he was my great-great-uncle, by the way) when I had just left school and was in business in the City. I was 19 : he was 84. I expanded with self-importance ; he was strangely simple and unaffected. I had begun to feel that I knew everything : he had long passed the age when he first felt that he knew nothing. In brief, I was a dogmatic prig : he was a tolerant philosopher. He at once began talking to me about my life in the City. Did it interest me ? Had I learnt much ? Was it my intention to keep at it and pave out a business career ? He soon changed the topic when he found that I was indifferent, and in a very short time got at my momentary weakness—theatres and playgoing generally. We talked of the modern drama and of Tree's Shakespearean productions. The latter interested me enormously, the former (in those days) hardly at all. I had not begun to grow. He wanted me to see one or two of Shaw's plays, and took tickets for me at the Court Theatre several times. In return for this concession on my part, he went with me to see Tree in "Nero." It pleased him, I remember, as he was already a little deaf and the spectacular part of the production appealed to him. He thought Tree "looked" the part. He noticed that some of the people got on their feet during the Tableau of the Burning of Rome, and thought this was strange, since the scene had already been given without mishap a sufficient number of times to allay any fear that its realism might otherwise engender. I said that they got up to go, as the play was almost over. " No," he replied, " for if that was so, they would make some attempt to search for their hats or coats in the act of rising." Details like this never escaped him. On one occasion he was asked to lecture on Eugenics before some social gathering. Owing to his age he wrote out the lecture and arranged for someone else to read it. Upon being asked to make a few remarks at the close of the meeting he said : " I have often observed that when people are interested in a discourse, the movements of their hands or legs are roughly two in every minute. When they are bored this number may be multiplied by four, or, at moments of excessive ennui, five. It gave me real pleasure to perceive that you were even absorbed in my paper. Your movements have averaged only one to the minute."

His mind and way of life were so practical as almost to seem eccentric. For instance, at one time he used to secrete a brick somewhere on his person. This would be attached to a piece of cord ; and, unobserved by those around him, he would quietly release the brick from its position, let it down to the ground, mount in order to gain a good view of some procession or other and draw it up to its resting-place at the close of the proceedings. At another time he was anxious to get material for a book, when it was necessary that he should strike a fair proportion in estimating the beauty or otherwise of the average woman. Thereupon he improvised some machine which ticked off numbers on a sheet of paper when a button was pressed. He placed one machine in his right-hand trousers pocket and another in his left. After which he strolled through the streets with his hands in his pockets and calmly pressed buttons—right, beauty; left, otherwise—as the female population passed him "regardless of their doom."

Galton had a character of great simplicity: there was not a shade of pose or affectation in him. It is a tribute to say of him that never once were you made conscious of his position in the scientific world. He was uniformly courteous and charming and simple. This simplicity was one of his three distinguishing characteristics. Another was his eminently practical, or, to speak more accurately, scientific, mind. Of this I have already given some examples. The third outstanding feature about him was the astonishing interest he took in almost every subject under the sun.

I think Boswell attributed to Johnson in a special degree the art of drawing out the best in everyone by discovering their chief interests and making these the topic of conversation. This is an exceptional gift and must be used spontaneously to have the right effect; there must not be a shadow of effort about it. I could never find a subject that Galton was not willing and eager to discuss—from golf to Egyptology. And he always managed to throw new light on matters upon which one liked to believe oneself an expert. I remember him asking me for my impressions of Mexico, where I had just been, and I was almost electrified at the knowledge he displayed, though he had never visited the country and the things we discussed were those little everyday affairs in the life of a people such as one could only seize upon and make actual to the listener after a personal visit to the place.

I think this part of his character, this well-nigh unlimited interest he took in everybody and everything, was the most distinctive thing about him, as it was certainly the cause of his many friendships and the attraction of all sorts and conditions of people to him. My mother, who knew him intimately for years, writes to me: " One thing perhaps that always struck me anew every time I saw him was the extraordinary sweetness of his expression, and as I think expression shows the inner man, I have always thought of him as being so full of kindliness. He certainly never frightened me as some great men might have done, and I never minded showing him my ignorance. He also explained things so very well, made things easy to understand. He generally managed to find out the things you were interested in and talked of these, taking such an extraordinary interest in them himself that the conversation was a delight. He was very lovable, and I think everyone who had much to do with him, high or low, was devoted to him. He was also unselfish and hated giving trouble to others. He was very fond of poetry and generally had a volume of Shakespeare close to him, but music he rather disliked than otherwise. None of the Galtons care much for music. . . . . . ."

Strangely enough, in the variety of topics he touched upon and so often irradiated with the torchlight of common-sense, Johnson seems to me the only big man of whom we have record at all comparable to Galton, though of course the enormous advance in the mental and spiritual outlook since Johnson's time no less than the unthinkable addition of inventions and the thousand and one other complexities of modern existence, made of Galton a man of far rarer calibre and wider culture.

In appearance, Galton was exactly like the painting Furze did of him. The likeness shows him in a very characteristic attitude and gets his expression, even the mould of the face, to perfection. His eyes were quite blue and set deep in the head, with finely prominent brows; the well-chiselled nose was surmounted by a forehead of such perfect proportion that one never really thought of him as bald; the mouth and chin, also, were statuesque in their modelling. When in repose, he sometimes, I don't know how, reminded me of the statue of the Dying Napoleon at Versailles. He was short, about 5 foot 6 inches I imagine, and at the time of which I am speaking he stooped considerably when walking. His voice was soft and had a smooth, sweet quality which enhanced the stillness and peace of his personality. There was always something very homely and quiet about him. He almost made a religion of cleanliness and fresh air. This sometimes amounted to bleakness. Visitors slid towards him over parquet floors—and smoking was strictly prohibited. Thick carpeting and upholstery he hated, for hygienic and asthmatic reasons.

He was fond of recounting little incidents in his own life or in the lives of his friends. He used, in fact, to make a story out of an incident, rounding it off artistically. Here is a typical example—I remember it because I heard him tell it twice—its simplicity perhaps appealed to him: "The Spaniards are still very superstitious. A friend of mine who lived in Spain once experienced a rather unpleasant example of this. He was driving home in his carriage one day when he passed a priest who was toiling up a hill with evident difficulty. He pulled the cord which communicated with his coachman on the box outside, and the carriage drew up at the side of the road. He then got out and offered the priest a seat in the carriage as far as he wanted to go. When inside, he asked the priest where he would like to descend: the priest told him, and the conversation drifted on to other things. At the appointed place, my friend pulled the communication cord, the carriage stopped, and the priest alighted after thanking him cordially for his kindness. Three days later, when out driving, his carriage suddenly pulled up with a jolt and he was politely requested by someone to step outside for a few minutes. Immediately his feet reached the ground, his arms were tightly pinioned behind him, a handkerchief was tied over his eyes, another over his mouth, and he was marched for some distance in complete silence with a hand of iron on each arm. At last they came to a house, and the door which closed behind them sounded heavily. He was pushed into a room where he remained for a short time apparently alone. In a few minutes, two or three men entered and took him along several passages into what seemed to him a large hall. Here his arms were freed and the bandages taken from his mouth and eyes. He found himself in a long, low room, lit by a few candles here and there, and standing before three masked men in dark gowns who were seated at a table draped in black. One of these men had a written scroll before him, which he commenced to read at once in a hard, firm voice: 'On Tuesday last, señor, you were on infallible grounds proved to be in league with the Evil One. But inasmuch as you showed sympathy with our brother Resarti, you have been granted the favour of appearing before these holy fathers, not for the object of proving yourself innocent, since that is impossible, but in order that you may receive forgiveness by rendering up to us the terms of your secret compact.' My friend, who had up to now regarded the adventure in the light of an amusing experience following on some easily rectifiable mistake, now realized that matters were more serious than he had imagined.

"'What is the nature of the indictment?' he asked.

"'Perhaps, señor, it will be unnecessary to repeat it if I recall briefly the occurrences of these forty minutes which our brother Resarti spent in your carriage on Tuesday last,' replied the first speaker. 'Please be good enough to do so,' said my friend, who was beginning to feel decidedly uneasy. The man continued to read from the paper before him: 'You will remember, then, that while you were both inside the carriage, but not before, our brother gave you the name of the hostel at which he desired to alight. You were unable to inform your coachman of this fact without first of all leaning out of the window and speaking plainly to him. This you did not do. No sign of communication between you and your servant in sin was made; and yet the carriage stopped within four feet of the door at which our brother requested that he might descend. These doings, señor, are only possible among the fellows and disciples of Satan. . . .' "

Galton's marriage, as far as I can make out, was not a particularly happy one. His wife took advantage of his essential kindness of heart and unselfish disposition. I have been told that any comfort which might have given pleasure to his leisure hours was often denied him by her. Even the chairs in the drawing-room were straight-backed and hard. She had, apparently, a mania for collecting letters written by celebrated people. At any rate a couple of albums crammed with autographs and letters (not all, by any means, written to her) were unearthed when Galton died. An original despatch from the Duke of Wellington, a trite postcard from Walter Pater, letters from Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and a host of other famous people, were there. I hardly think Galton could have taken much interest in this whirl of celebrity hunting. I fear he must have felt sadly out of it.

But his later years were very happy ones. His niece, Miss Evelyn Biggs, gave him the full benefit of a charming and invigorating companionship. Her unselfish care and joy of living helped in no small degree to make his life at the latter end one of great content and exceptional enjoyment. I must quote here from a letter she sent me nine years after his death: " Uncle Frank was full of ready wit in small everyday matters. We had a cook from the Isle of Man, and when she had left the room, after being interviewed for the first time, he gravely remarked: 'I didn't see her third leg—did you notice it?' He was particularly amusing in repartee. When he and Mary Coleridge met, they were most witty together, and one was simply astonished at the fund of wit and learning of each. They were the best of friends. But when Dr. Lillias Hamilton came to the house, the repartee was like lightning; no one spoke but these two, and the company laughed all the time without stopping. It was pure fun, and hardly any dinner was eaten—even I forgot my food, which is rare!"

Let me, finally, try to give some idea of his wide interests and deeper feelings. It was never easy to get him to talk of things that affected himself. He preferred always to find out what people had to say for themselves and to keep the discussion well within the region of everyday happenings. In fact I only got to know him at all intimately during the last few talks we had together, while I was staying with him for two or three days during the winter of 1909–10 in a house he had taken at Haslemere.

One day we drove over to Tennyson's house—"to renew my memories of him" he said. While we stood on the terrace in front of the house, looking at the splendid view, he remarked: "Tennyson was a great poet, but his over-done popularity during his lifetime has cost him dear. People foolishly likened him to Shakespeare—and the inevitable reaction has set in. His worst poetry was invariably the most popular; but he will come into his right place when the tide turns. He had more to say than Swinburne, but Swinburne will be paid the price of neglect and so win the popularity that Tennyson has lost." On the road we passed the spot where Tyndall lies buried. Galton told me that Tyndall had expressed a desire to be buried in unconsecrated ground and had particularly requested that no Church Service should be said over his body. He had even charged Galton himself to see that his wishes were carried out. "After a battle-royal with his widow," said my uncle, "we won the day." And there, sure enough, Tyndall lies, with no stone to mark his resting-place, since he had wished it so, in an open field, his grave covered with wild flowers and brambles.

"Were you glad you were knighted ?" I asked him later. "Yes and no," he replied : "Yes, because it has drawn more public attention to Eugenics ; no, because it has trebled my correspondence." He did not believe in over-straining the case in favour of Eugenics ; he felt certain it would by degrees be accepted on common-sense grounds : "It should be spread by Fabian methods, a gradual inculcation of its needs ; it would do more harm than good if forcibly pressed forward in its entirety —we would become cranks in the public eye." Here, as always, he was very far-seeing. The big Eugenic Conference in London after his death was made the subject of some ridicule, and Eugenics has already produced antagonism (chiefly, perhaps, in the spasms of G. K. Chesterton) where, if left to the time-influence, it would be accepted as a necessary part of social evolution.

"How is it," I asked him once, "that Bertillon has received the honour and glory of the fingerprint discovery, and you are never mentioned in connection with it ?"

"I believe," he answered, "that the man who invents a thing, or the pioneer of a movement, never gets the fame of the man who makes a practical application of the invention or who opens out the further possibilities (usually lucrative) of the discovery. I suggested to Bertillon that he should use my finger-print theory to make his method of measurements doubly effective. He did not see his way to adopt my plan for some time, but afterwards it became his chief stock-in-trade; in fact his own theories were a complete failure in many respects. The finger-print system was afterwards introduced into other countries, but as my own time was then occupied with different work, Bertillon played the showman wherever it went. In that way, I suppose, he got nearly all the kudos of the undertaking and gradually people began to suppose the discovery his."

One evening I happened to say that I was becoming a Liberal in politics, since the Conservatives didn't seem to know what they wanted—they had no constructive programme. "Fancy being a Conservative at your age!" said he, laughing. "Most men begin life as red-hot Republicans and end life as stiff-necked Tories. Why, I thought all the young men in the country nowadays were Socialists. All thinking men change their politics, and the majority change them for worse. If you are a Conservative now, I shan't envy your fireside acquaintances when you are seventy. You'll be a blood-red revolutionist at an age when most men are content with the opinions of their grand-parents!" "Did you ever admire any particular big-pot in the political world?" I asked. "I'm afraid," he replied, "that my interest in politicians has always been a phrenological one. Their views don't interest me as much as their heads. Gladstone had one of the finest heads of any man of my time. He once allowed me to measure it, and I told him that there was only one finer head than his in the kingdom. 'Really,' said he, rather annoyed, I thought, that his head was not as exceptional as his oratory, 'I would like to meet the owner—we must find him a place in the Cabinet—who is he?' 'Myself,' I replied; 'your powers of observation are not acute.' He was amused at my impertinence, but I noticed that my head received his critical regard more than once before he left. A few years later I was at a dinner given by some Society to the leading lights of the various professions. Nearly opposite me sat a man with the most marvellous head I have ever seen in my life. I immediately asked my neighbour who it was. 'Henry Irving, the actor,' I was told. I had never been to the Lyceum Theatre, but, without knowing it, Irving had made a conquest of me at first sight, and his head did what a stage-version of Shakespeare could never have done—it drew me to his theatre time after time. But as everybody is not necessarily a student of phrenology, I never suggested to him that he should take down his advertisements and merely walk about the streets with his hat off!"

I remember at about that time Oscar Wilde's works had made a great impression on me—his wit and style seemed to me inimitable—and I asked Galton whether he had ever met him.

"I used to see him occasionally, but I never wanted to make his acquaintance. He annoyed me by posing in elegant attitudes at a club I sometimes frequented. Everything about him seemed to denote a lazy boredom. I believe he was utterly insincere."

This was the first time I had ever known him speak harshly of anyone, and his manner surprised me. "Have you read his work?" I pursued; "surely you must allow him genius?—read this," I added before he could reply, and I gave him "The Soul of Man under Socialism."

But he laid it aside. "Sure to be well put," was all he said, dismissing the subject with a wave of the hand. Strange, I thought, that so broad-minded a man should allow personal dislike to interfere with literary appreciation. Besides, humour was the quality in literature he prized the most. Coming back into the room a short while after, I found him reading "The Soul of Man" with evident interest. But I did not remark on it, thinking that to renew the subject would displease him—he had shown for the first time in my knowledge such obvious bias. Hamlet's words came to mind. "There is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out. . . ." And then in a flash I remembered that he came from a Quaker stock. So it wasn't altogether his fault.

Some months before this time (I was staying with him early in February, 1910) he had picked up at St. Jean de Luz, while on a visit to the Continent, a little piece of "drain-trap" (he called it) which seemed to be covered with the rust of ages. I suppose he had found it in some out-of-the-way street. He seemed to attach great value to this bit of old metal, regarding it in the light of a relic, and he used it on his desk as a pen-holder. He had tried without success to get it clean and bright, but the rust had bitten into it, and no smithy could doctor it up. I said that I thought it could be done, and he gave it me to take away, not without considerable anxiety on his part that I should on no account lose sight of it. I had it brightened up in a motor workshop, and received this very characteristic letter from him in acknowledgment: "1,000 thanks. The dear old piece of drain-trap is now rendered beautiful, and will adorn my writing-table for the rest of my working life. I see the marks upon it of the grinding substance. This cast iron is, I suppose, of the nature of what is used in the Navy for 'chilled' shot and armour plates. Its exceeding hardness makes one hope to get further improvement in bettering steel tools (but quere). . . ." At the age of 89 he was still interested in everything that could perplex or employ the human brain, his mind still open to the possibilities of invention and ingenuity, still occupied with everyday matters which lesser men would label insignificant and ignore!

The morning of the day I left we had a last chat together. Long before this I had noticed that Shakespeare's comedies (especially "Henry IV") and Sheridan's and Congreve's plays seemed his favourite reading for recreative purposes, and I wanted to find out why it was he preferred the lighter classics and rarely paid much attention to the deeper things in literature. I asked him this, and his reply was of great interest. I had never thought of him as very sensitive, even weak, and the added touch made him intensely human to me. "I used to read your favourite works at one time," he said, "and they have all afforded me keen enjoyment. But poetry, especially the poetry of Shakespeare's great period—'Hamlet' and 'Lear'—makes me sad and unhappy now. Shakespearean tragedy is so real, so true, that it brings the unending tragedy of life before my eyes, and I have to close the book to keep a hold over myself. I am, alas! too much of a sentimentalist by nature, and all through my life I have had to put restraint on my emotions. Music, also, I avoid as much as possible: it awakes memories, and mine are naturally too keen to need a stimulus. Sometimes I come across a simple lyric that I once knew by heart, embedded in a newspaper article, and I have to rid myself of it before I can get to work. . . . Humour, on the other hand, invigorates me wonderfully. I simply revel in Falstaff, and Sheridan's wit gives me constant delight, though Molière is my favourite after Shakespeare." He spoke all this in a simple unaffected manner, though he broke off once and gazed into the fire for a moment.

Glancing back at him there by the fire, with the glow of it on his face, I thought again of the sitting figure of Napoleon at Versailles: the likeness seemed stronger than ever. And yet, what a contrast! The very idea was unthinkable. . . . I never saw him again, but my memory of him remains, clear and undimmed with the passage of time.

As a man lives, so does he die. Charles II as wit, Oscar Wilde as humorist, lived up to their reputations at the final Exit. And now I must add another characteristic end to the many that have gone before. When Galton was being shown over the house he eventually took at Grayshott for the winter of 1910–11, and in which he died a month or so after his arrival, he remarked on reaching the top of the stairs leading to his bedroom: "This will be an awkward corner to get my coffin round."

Practical to the last. . . .

## IV

## SIR GEORGE ALEXANDER

THE letters G. A., in big, bold capitals, which appeared for so many years in gilt on portions of the St. James's Theatre, in type on its programmes, and eventually in sculpture over the portal to his house at Chorley Wood, give us a first-rate index to the man, George Alexander, his mind and art. They stood both for his success and the method whereby it was attained. He was the best and most typical product of London Society for twenty-five years before August, 1914. He catered to the tastes and foibles of that Society in its theatre-going just as the manager of the Savoy Hotel catered to the tastes and foibles of that Society in its restaurant-going; and exactly in so far as such drama was more or less important than such tables d'hôte, was the manager of the St. James's Theatre more or less important than the manager of the Savoy Hotel. He produced plays that were correctly risky, and they became the talk of a social world that was correctly risky. He seldom deviated one hair's breadth from the safe path of correct riskiness.

For the most part, his theatre mirrored to absolute perfection the people who patronized its stalls. He knew, none better, that the stalls enjoyed the gilded pill of romance about themselves, and that the gallery loved to see the stalls swallow it. No real medicine was possible, for his audiences wouldn't pay to be choked or for the privilege of having a nasty taste in the mouth. The light parts had to be charmingly playful, the serious parts had to be pleasantly sentimental, and the plot had to savour of scandal without being in any way truthfully objectionable. Adultery was invariably touched on and inevitably touched up. Murder, suicide and dipsomania conformed to the limits of the respectable and were made unshockingly dramatic. The working classes were seldom, if ever, introduced. Significant social problems were carefully avoided. It was the drama of the genteel—the Apotheosis of the Butterfly. In a commercial age, he adhered strictly to commercial plays; the box office receipts were his justification and his reward. His dramas were triumphs of monetary speculation: they were quite innocent of mental speculation. Pinero was his god; Wilde was his rather uncertain archangel.

The question naturally arises: what did he do for the stage worthy of record? I think his public fame will rest entirely on the fact that he produced the greatest farcical comedy in the English language; while to his brother-artists he was an ideal actor-manager.

Firstly, a word on his public work. Not to be out of the running, he produced two Shakespearean plays; but owing to his infallible sense of what was, or should have been, popular, he picked on Shakespeare's most commonplace, conventional, Victorian pieces—"As You Like It" and "Much Ado About Nothing." No comment is necessary. Then, not to be behind a time that was itself behind the times, he gave a series of Pineronian masterpieces, beginning with that very unmasterly experiment "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" (which was simply the St. James's version of what I should like to term a Melvillo-drama) and consummating the series with the best example of a "well-made" play in existence—"His House In Order"—which a pseudo-religious theatre-going public found altogether satisfactory. Pinero exhausted the obvious on the boards of the St. James's Theatre. He was, I believe, the least spontaneous writer who ever attempted emotion in drama—and George Alexander "produced" him to perfection.

Leaving Shakespeare and Pinero out of the question, therefore—since the Shakespearean productions were not sufficiently important to count and none of Pinero's plays count at all—we come to Oscar Wilde, whose master-work, "The Importance of being Earnest," is unique on the stage of this or any other country. A great deal of nonsense has been talked at one time or another about Wilde's place in literature. The commonest form of nonsense talked about his plays is that they stand in the direct line of artificial comedy, established in this country by Congreve and Sheridan. This is so ridiculously untrue that I am amazed no one has had the ordinary critical ability to contradict it. Wilde brought to drama a humour and humanity which they utterly lacked. One laughs *at* their characters but *with* his. They were objective artists; he was a subjective artist. His plays contain a very definite moral criticism; their plays are merely immoral curiosities. They catalogued but did not comment, except superficially. His wit sparkled from a higher intellectual level than theirs, and his humanity lent him emotion and a sense of the deeper things in life; while they never went beneath the surface, skimming lightly on the crystal ice that froze over the shallows of existence. In short, their comedy glitters from without, while his comedy glows from within.

But though Wilde was the only dealer in the Comedy of Manners who did not turn it into a mannerism of comedy, there is some truth in the statement that he followed the Congreve-Sheridan tradition in his three serio-comedies, if only because they are primarily witty and may be regarded as the literary fashion-plates of the eighteen-nineties. When, however, he wrote "The Importance of being Earnest," he broke away even from that shadowy tradition and produced a work that will be the unending delight of "states unborn and accents yet unknown." Its wit is only accidental—humour, a much greater thing, permeates it. It is the only work of its kind that stands quite outside criticism. It reveals the most entertaining personality in literary history—and there is simply nothing more to be said about it.

Now to Alexander belongs the certain honour, then a risky one, of introducing Wilde as a dramatist to the public, and the uncertain honour, then a correct one, of dropping the curtain on him when

Society decided it should be dropped. Also, the ease and polish, the finish, of Alexander's work as actor and producer were just the qualities for these dramas; and if Wilde does, as I fear, become a classic—even if, as I hope, he keeps his freshness for the delight, but not the model-hunters, of future generations—then George Alexander will be held in grateful memory as the man who paid him first tribute.

One other thing happened during his reign at the St. James's which I mustn't neglect to mention. This was something right off his too-well-beaten track. He produced the most deliciously beautiful blank-verse play since Shakespeare: Stephen Phillips's " Paolo and Francesca." But as blank-verse drama is a played-out fashion (Shakespeare having made it fashionable and having played it out), Alexander's fame as an actor-manager must stand or fall with Wilde's fame as a dramatist.

Imaginatively and artistically Alexander was immature. He had, of course, the business instinct very strongly developed, knew as a rule whether a play would be a money-maker or not, but resolutely turned his back on the intellectual movement in the theatre that was going on all round him. He was simply incapable of original judgment on the plays he produced himself or the plays anyone else produced. He had one word, " charming," to express his likes, and one word, " unpleasant," to express his dislikes. All Shakespeare, from " A Midsummer Night's Dream " to " King Lear," was, as a matter of course, " charming." All Shaw was, equally as a matter of course,

" unpleasant." " The Blue Bird," " Charley's Aunt," " Oedipus Rex," the latest Revue and " The Silver Box " were all " charming." Ibsen in general was " unpleasant," and " Ghosts " in particular was " disgusting." I only heard him use the last word that once. He rarely committed himself so far. His language, like himself, was nothing if not genteel. He never gave himself away, never stepped outside the limits of correct physical deportment and perfect mental decorum. His mind and his trousers were always immaculately pressed and creased. That his mind should move freely and unconventionally, or that his trousers should become baggy and unfashionable, was inconceivable. In method and in manner he was spick-and-span.

His curious conservatism and lack of individual taste were amazingly illustrated in his house at Chorley Wood, where the furniture was all arranged exactly as in a scene of a Pinero drama. While sitting on a perfect specimen of Tottenham Court Road art, I couldn't help feeling that the curtain might at any moment go up, when everyone would be expected to behave in a proper Tanqueray manner.

Towards the end of his life, he became regretful and reminiscential. He was sorry, for example, that he had treated Oscar Wilde so badly, and more and more he lapsed sentimentally towards past achievements and the memory of earlier things. He tried to make up for the former by leaving at his death the rights of " Lady Windermere's Fan " and " The Importance of being Earnest " to Wilde's children, having previously made a fortune out of them for himself; and when I remarked one evening that the pit queue was excellent, I caught him bemoaning his halcyon days: "Ah!" he sighed, "you would not say that if you had been with me in 'The Prisoner of Zenda.' Then the queues stretched into St. James's Street." I ought perhaps to add that "The Prisoner of Zenda" was a "charming" play.

But I want to do justice to Alexander. He was at his very best on a committee. It is as a committee-worker that I wish to commemorate him. He was a flawless committee man. He had a committee temperament, if I may so express it without seeming to disparage a really remarkable gift. Most committees are, as everyone knows, self-admiration associations. The chief point about them is the unlimited love each member has for himself and his own obsolete or obstructive ideas. As I knew them, theatrical committees without Alexander were far more entertaining than the average plays produced by the "stars" who sat on them. With him, they were undramatically brief and business-like; everything was done with the least possible amount of talk, difficulties were cleared away in a moment, and whole heaps of impossible nonsense disappeared from agenda papers and minute books. In fact, he converted them from the usual lengthy and amusing absurdities into unusually dry and short-lived proceedings. He introduced method and work into a world of glorified footledom. His idea when attending a committee meeting was that something had to be done, and he did it. Other people considered that something had to be talked about, and they chattered—mostly about themselves.

Luckily I am able to show him at work on the stiffest committee job, as he afterwards confessed to me, that he had ever undertaken; and in doing so, I can place his bearing and behaviour side by side with that of his brother-artists. He comes out well in the contrast.

Alexander was Chairman, and I was Secretary, of the organizing committee for the Shakespeare Tercentenary Performance at Drury Lane Theatre in 1916. All the leading actors of the day were on that committee. One or two never came to the meetings at all, notably Tree, the President, who was in America at the time; but Alexander was the only member except myself who never missed a single meeting. There were, besides, several sub-committees, the meetings of which we both regularly attended, dealing with such matters as the casting of the play ("Julius Caesar"), the casting of the tableaux, the music, the sale of programmes, and so on. It was felt an honour by nearly everyone to be connected in any way, however small, with such a memorable affair, and every actor who was not serving out of England at the time willingly offered his services in any humble capacity designed for him by the committee. Every actor, that is, except the so-called or self-styled "stars."

George Alexander flung himself, heart and soul, into the business, in spite of many painful bouts of the illness that eventually killed him. He worked, he drudged, unceasingly. Practically the whole thing was done off his own bat—the committee of famous actors was merely an obstruction. When his ear was not glued to the telephone, he was writing letters, seeing people, or talking matters over with me. At any time—morning, afternoon, and at night during the spasmodic intervals of his own performances—he would be at my disposal, patiently listening to the hundred and one points that cropped up almost hourly, advising, listening to advice, explaining, listening to explanations, with an untiring courtesy, humour and charm quite beyond any praise of mine. His business capacity throughout was only equalled by his imperturbability and his sound common-sense. I never knew him give an opinion that was not incomparably more lucid, admirable, and in the event more practical, than that of anyone else on the various committees he served with. The real work of the world is done by committees, and Alexander was a born world-worker. It was a pity his activities were chiefly concerned with the stage. He had the self-effacing conscientiousness of a great statesman, while most of his brother-managers had the self-glorifying unscrupulousness which distinguishes our front-benchers and politicians.

The first decision Alexander came to, as chairman of the casting sub-committee, was to cut himself completely out of the cast. He would, as a matter of fact, have played Brutus better than anyone, and he would have enjoyed doing it, but he decided to take no part in it on the ground that the younger men should be given a chance. He suggested Matheson Lang for Brutus and the committee agreed, though without much enthusiasm from one or two quarters. Thereafter it was adumbrated that Mr. Arthur Bourchier felt slighted at being passed over, he having already played the part with Sir Herbert Tree at His Majesty's Theatre, receiving high praise for his performance from all those who believed he might again go into management on his own account and be of some use to them. Delicately, therefore, Mr. Bourchier absented himself from the next meeting of the casting committee, and the crisis was discussed.

"I can't see him in the part, myself," said Alexander. "Nor can anyone else," said H. B. Irving. "Except himself," chipped in Du Maurier. Everyone agreed finally that he was the very last man for the part—and everyone agreed finally that he must be cast for it. "We mustn't have bad feeling on the committee," Alexander summed up, "so I'm afraid there's only one thing for it: give him the part and he'll help us on the committee, don't give it him and we'll never hear the end of it." The general feeling of the committee being that matters would run more smoothly with Bourchier soothed by Brutus than ruffled by Flavius or Marullus, it was agreed that the part should be offered him. (Note. Thus placated, he literally ate out of the committee's hands thenceforward.)

Next came the question of Marc Antony. Alexander said "Henry Ainley." After the Bourchier episode everyone agreed hastily, almost falling over one another in their excitement to eclipse themselves utterly. There was, for a moment, a perfect craze for self-suppression. "What about Cassius?" queried Sir George. "I suggest Harry," he continued, turning to H. B. Irving. "Yes, yes, admirable," murmured the committee. "No, no, what of the younger men?" risked H. B. It certainly was a risk, because the rest of the committee were beginning to wonder what *they* would be doing when all the fat parts had been bestowed. The committee murmured correct responses, but the post-Bourchier enthusiasm was noticeably on the wane; so, veering to the only quite safe point on the compass, H. B. asked Alexander: "Do you really think it would be best?" And, comforted by the latter's reply, he quickly accepted in the following well-chosen words: "I shall try to deserve the honour you all do me, but I will gladly retire in favour of anyone more worthy than I—and there are many." No one feeling equal to the occasion, Alexander rapidly went on with the casting. "I think," he said, "that I am not only voicing the opinion of the committee but of the whole theatrical profession, as well as the general public, when I say that Frank Benson should play the title-rôle." This time there was manifested quite honest enthusiasm, not only because Frank had no enemies, but also because the part of Julius Caesar is the most thankless title-rôle in the whole body of English dramatic art, and everyone knew that dear old Benson couldn't possibly out-mouth Caesar's mouthing. It was a piece of casting both safe and popular. Also no member of the committee hankered after the part. Benson bowed his head gracefully before the storm of eager gratulation, and accepted his fate with becoming modesty and thankfulness.

Mutually complimentary speeches having been given and received, there was a lull, at the end of which Du Maurier asked to be put down for one of the citizens. This terrific act of self-abasement sent a shudder through everybody present. The tension was increased when Charles Hawtrey said that he would "walk-on." Everyone was, of course, thankful they had not suggested themselves for serious parts, but for decency's sake it was generally felt they should have kept silent and "let determined things to destiny hold unbewailed their way." But it is a wonderful and beautiful thing to see a great man humbling himself, for in few other ways can he be so exalted. Curiously enough, however, the disease is not catching, and the rest of the committee regarded the action of these two in the light of a joke, quite characteristic of both comedians. I solemnly entered their names under the heading of "Citizens with lines" (i.e. lines supplied by Shakespeare, not those left to the imagination of the incoherent if articulate mob) and the serious business of the meeting was resumed.

Casca was the next part to be cast. Everyone agreed that it should be given to a corpulent member of the fraternity. Someone said (I think it was Ben Greet, but my notes do not help me here) that this was the part Bourchier ought to play. Sensation. Alexander emphatically intervened. "That's already settled by vote of the committee," he said, scenting the danger; "we must think of someone else."

"Who has the larger belly—Asche or Calvert?" asked Hawtrey. The subject of stomachs was carefully gone into, and Oscar Asche gained the suffrages of the majority. He was duly cast for the part.

There now only remained the subsidiary parts. The final decision as to these was left to Alexander, but a number of names were definitely pronounced worthy of inclusion, among others Martin Harvey and Fred Terry, neither of whom was present.

Finally I read several letters. One of them was from Godfrey Tearle, begging to be allowed to take any part, long or short, in the performance, and offering his services as an assistant stage-manager, or in any other drudging capacity. Charles Hawtrey promptly objected on the ground that Tearle was not in khaki. " I," said he, " will sever my connection with the whole affair if Tearle is allowed to do anything." This virtuous and patriotic sentiment, coming as it did from a man of such high standing in his profession, was perforce echoed by his comrades, if somewhat shamefacedly by the younger ones, who felt they themselves might be called to the colours if the war went on long enough. But Hawtrey, in the full security of his age, bated no jot of his martial vigour. The fact that "Dear Old Charley" had been through the Bankruptcy Courts was a feather in the scale against the immense issues now involved, and Godfrey Tearle was sacrificed by the committee on the altar of Hawtrey's civic morality.

Having thus satisfied their consciences, both by the work they imagined they had done and the patriotic tinge that had been imparted to their disinterested endeavours, the committee broke up. It is hardly necessary to add that George Alexander had guided and inspired all the work except the black-balling episode just related.

Fred Terry and Martin Harvey answered the invitation of the committee to take part in the performance, the former by stating that he was on tour and couldn't give the necessary time to rehearsals, the latter by expressing his surprise that he hadn't been cast for Antony. His services to Shakespeare and his prestige as an actor, he said, entitled him to the part. Under the circumstances he regretted he couldn't associate himself with the proceedings. I understand that our leading actors will unhesitatingly sacrifice everything to Shakespeare—except the right to play his leading parts. It is, you see, merely a question of prestige, which must on no account be confused with vanity or any such common failing.

Poor old G. A., as we used to call him. He had his share of this sort of thing all through those preparatory weeks. I remember he was worried to death by Raymond Roze, who asked if he could conduct his own music to "Julius Caesar." Permission being granted, Roze pestered Alexander, day in, day out, for an increase in the orchestra. "My work, my position" (he meant prestige) "demand it," he said. Nothing short of converting the entire auditorium as well as the stage into a gigantic orchestra would have pleased him.

Then there was Lady Alexander with her "stunts," one of which was to provide beautiful dresses ("uniforms" she called them) for the programme sellers. This would have probably swallowed up all the profits of the performance.

Then there were the aged actor-knights, Bancroft, Hare and Wyndham, and their unknighted contemporary Kendal, who wanted the show to be run *their* way, which would have resulted in their all pulling different ways, plus an indefinite postponement of the Tercentenary Celebration of Shakespeare's death till it was about time to celebrate the Quatercentenary of his birth.

Also, we received a letter from Miss Marie Corelli. It was a gem. It should have been printed and circulated with an *edition de luxe* of her complete works, thus ensuring the continued support of the great Caine-Corelli public. In it she said that a special grand-tier box should have been reserved for her. Why wasn't it ? It should have been the best box in the house after (loyal woman !) the Royal Box. It was due to her position (or did she say prestige ?) as the leading female novelist of the age. She regarded the omission as a decided slur on her qualities as an artist. She might, in a sense, she said, almost be called America's representative on the occasion, since an influential U.S. paper had asked her to describe the event fully. Did we realize that in not giving her the best box we were risking a rupture between Great Britain and the United States at a crucial moment in the former's fortunes ? The result of the war might be said to depend upon that box, etc., etc. In conclusion, she washed her hands of the whole matter. She would not come now if we went on our bended knees. If America declared war on England, we could thank ourselves for having provided the *casus belli*, as the decisive factor would be the box, and so forth and so on. The foregoing may not be an accurate transcription, but it very faithfully renders the tone of Miss Corelli's letter. It was all very, very terrible. We had heard the lady was an author of great "cutting" power. This time she had cut, and cut, and come again!

Lastly—yes, for purely artistic purposes it must be lastly—there was the great Tree scene. I call it the great Tree scene because Herbert Beerbohm was undoubtedly the protagonist, though he didn't personally act a part in it. Quite definitely he was the hero, but it was his Lady who daubed his statue.

One day, while I was working in my office at the St. James's Theatre, I received an urgent request to go up and see Sir George. I found him walking up and down his room. He looked careworn and seemed to have suddenly put a dozen years on to his age. My heart went out to him as I realized that, between us, we were killing him before his time. From that moment I decided to take as few of my own secretarial worries to him as possible. I am glad to say I kept to my decision, though I got into hot water on one or two later occasions for having acted on my own responsibility.

From the worried look on his face as he paced to and fro I guessed that something quite out of the common had occurred. I was both right and wrong. What had happened was not quite out of the common, because it was the sort of thing that frequently occurs in organizing big theatrical entertainments. But the fuss that had been made out of a tiny and easily rectifiable slip was, I am glad to say, most uncommon. In sending out the preliminary notices to the press, I had forgotten to mention that the scenery and costumes for "Julius Caesar" were being lent by Sir Herbert Tree. That was all. But it cost the already weary and over-worked chairman a very painful forty minutes on the telephone. I must partly imagine the details of the scene, the main points of which Alexander there and then gave me. I fully realize that only Dickens could do justice to the thing, but that does not absolve me from doing my best.

Lady Tree, with her distinguished husband engaged in cinema work on the far side of America, naturally felt that she was guardian of the family's fair name in the other four continents. With a due sense of her far-reaching responsibilities, she had that morning digested "The Times" with her eggs and bacon. To do her justice, we must assume that the list of casualties from the various fronts that morning was not more than ordinarily high. At any rate she did not waste much time over them. Her eye caught and was held by a paragraph headed "Shakespeare Tercentenary Commemoration Performance." *Gott im Himmel!* There was no mention in it of Herbert. True, it was merely a preliminary puff, but Herbert's name should not only be puffed but blown at all times and in all seasons. Alexander told me that by the time she had got through to him on the 'phone, she was nearly speechless and IT (the paragraph) was in capital letters. He naturally thought at first that "it" had reference to the war, and upon being asked breathlessly by her whether he had seen "it," he glanced out of the window and up at the sky, expecting to see a super-Zeppelin dropping bombs as big as St. Paul's Cathedral.

Eventually, however, he rose to the occasion, and for well over half an hour the following piece of dialogue was repeated *ad nauseam*:

LADY TREE.—It's dreadful to think of poor dear Herbert being left out. He's so sensitive. He'll feel it was done on purpose.

ALEXANDER.—No, no, I assure you——

LADY TREE.—But can't something be done at once?

ALEXANDER.—Well, I'm afraid we can't suppress the morning papers, but I promise to——

LADY TREE.—It's awful. It really is. You must do something this very minute.

ALEXANDER.—Certainly; I'll arrange for——

LADY TREE.—What on earth will people *think*? Don't you *see* that this paragraph must be stopped *now*?

ALEXANDER.—I'm really more sorry than I can say. I will——

LADY TREE.—I don't know *what* the Prime Minister will say. I hardly *dare* speak to him about it.

ALEXANDER.—No, please don't. Believe me——

LADY TREE.—It *has* upset me. I would rather *anything* happened but this. It's really most unchivalrous of you.

ALEXANDER.—Now I beg you to leave this to me. I promise faithfully——

Lady Tree.—Oh, dear! Oh, dear! It doesn't bear thinking about. For Herbert's sake you must do something immediately. Please, *please.* He's so sensitive. . . .

Etc., etc. (*recurring*).

After the first three or four repetitions, Sir George had learnt his words by heart, and went on saying them with growing conviction, building the part up, so to speak, but he expressed himself to me as "a sadder and a wiser man," when he hung up the receiver at the close of the final performance.

At his bidding I returned to my office and sent about sixty telegrams to the leading papers and press agencies of the United Kingdom making good the omission. We then wrote a letter to Lady Tree telling her what had been done, since she wouldn't allow Alexander to get in a word edgeways over the 'phone, and expressed the heartfelt regrets of everybody concerned for the Shakespearean calamity that had overtaken the various members of her family. Then, but not till then, we breathed again, and carried on the more necessary, if less devitalizing, work we had in hand.

But the incident threatened to assume international momentousness. I must again draw attention to the fact that Europe was at that time engaged in a vast and varying conflict. Perhaps the most important personage then alive was the Right Honourable H. H. Asquith, English Prime Minister, and he lay sick in bed. Undeterred by his illness, and the fact that whatever strength he possessed would doubtless be required to deal with the many military and political problems of the hour, Lady Tree descended upon Number 10 Downing Street, armed with that fatal press cutting. We do not know, we cannot guess, what took place at the meeting. I can picture it to myself, but the picture is far too rich and affecting to be put into words. The thought of it will solace me in my dying hours.

Lady Tree wrote a letter describing the Premier's solicitude for her distress and his anxiety that her husband should figure in all bills, programmes, press notices and other public announcements. In handing the letter to me, Alexander said with an ironical grin: "What a treat it is to meet in real life a truly devoted couple like the Trees!"

When the Tercentenary Celebration was over and done with, Alexander asked me what I thought of our leading actors and actresses. I said that they didn't bear thinking about. "And how," I added, "do *you* feel about it all?" He sank back into his chair, and, with something between a sigh and a groan, replied: "Never again!"

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In conclusion I would like to speak an actor's word on the manager's personality. He was a strangely reticent man. One always felt that conversation with him might at any moment come suddenly to an end, and that everything depended upon one's own powers of keeping it up. Possibly this did not apply to men of his own age. Probably it was due to his business-like habits. He was perpetually doing something. I could never imagine him reclining in an arm-chair with carpet-slippered feet resting on the mantelpiece. His cut-and-dried, practical methods were a godsend to a nerve-racked generation of actors and actresses who, at the St. James's, could always depend within a very few minutes on the hour of commencement and the hour of dismissal at rehearsals. At any other theatre I was acquainted with, they could depend on nothing except that no rehearsal would begin or end at the stipulated hour. Another inestimable point in his favour was that he never attempted to browbeat anyone in his employ; he never lost his temper and was never sarcastic at another's expense. He was invariably considerate, the essence of courtesy, thoughtfulness, sympathy and tact—and he was as just as he was thorough. These things may appear insignificant to an outsider, but they were important to the members of a profession who, in the hands of many of his managerial contemporaries, were in turn bullied, cheated, insulted, worsted, and in general chivied about from pillar to post.

I, personally, have especial cause to be grateful to Alexander. He helped and encouraged me at a time when help and encouragement were priceless. And mine was by no means a solitary case. Indeed, I never knew a man who was so appreciated by his fellow-workers. He judged people on their merits, and in giving opportunities to others he served no selfish purpose. His judgment, too, was rarely at the mercy of his sentiment. Essentially one's affection for him was tempered by respect, because he had none of the weaknesses usually associated with his professional brethren.

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He was humane without being very human, likeable without being very lovable.

And, whatever his shortcomings as actor and playmonger, let this be his epitaph: He was a man first and a mummer afterwards—thus reversing the customary procedure of stage celebrities.

## V

# FRANK HARRIS

FRANK HARRIS is the most dynamic writer alive. He has brought the impulse of life into letters. He has lived his own writings. Others have brought ordinary, everyday life into contact with letters—Kipling, for instance, and the journalists—but to Harris belongs the honour of transferring tense spiritual emotions to the written page. His appeal is to the men and women who have lived, not drifted, through life; or to those who have the instinct, without the actual experience, of life's primary sensations. That is why he doesn't appeal to our so-called literary artists. He has no conscious style of expression. The style is the man. He does not deal in "situations" and "third acts." All the acts in his dramas are equally good. If a climax occurs at all, it occurs in the right, the inevitable place; it is never forced. A work by most writers is like a manure heap, with a solitary rose-bush in the centre. A work by Frank Harris is tropical. You don't know how it all grows; you just realize the amazing fact that it has grown and that it is all very much alive and pricking.

We are a very chaste nation. Our literature is chaste, our morality is chaste, our art is chaste. We even worship a chaste God, regarding as we do chastity as a virtue. It was my painful duty at one time to read all the books on Shakespeare that had ever been written by English critics. They were all chaste books by chaste writers and their object was to prove Shakespeare a model of chastity. At the end of that appalling experience I came across Frank Harris's books on Shakespeare. I knew at once that they were the finest, indeed the only great, works of creative criticism in the language. As to whether his "Man: Shakespeare" was in truth the very person who wrote "Hamlet," "Henry IV," etc., hardly mattered a scrap. What did matter was that Shakespeare, for the first time, had been humanized for us and that the vital personality of Harris was very clearly reflected in the mirror of Shakespeare's poetry.

So I got the rest of his books and was astounded to find my admiration for the author increasing by leaps and bounds. As a rule, with me, it is the other way about. I shall never forget my delight when I read "The Bomb," a novel in a million, and "Sonia," a short story without a peer—both of them gospels for the great and caviare to the coward. Then came "Unpath'd Waters," which contains more real genius, a larger humanity, a deeper comprehension, a wider vision, than any volume of short stories I know. And, lastly, but *facile princeps*, that wonderful series of "Contemporary Portraits," a new art in our language, with its master-portrait of Oscar

Wilde, surely the most poignant soul-study we possess.

* * * * *

I first got to know Frank Harris in July, 1913. He then occupied a flat at 67 Lexham Gardens, South Kensington. I heard him lecture at a curious underground club called the Petit Cabaret in Heddon Street, and afterwards went to see him at his flat. First impressions of unusual men are apt to be striking, but a first impression of Harris is more likely to be startling. The vigour and violence of his speech alone took my breath away. He had the most resonant voice I have ever heard in my life, and the most uncompromising method of expressing himself. Almost, one might say, electric sparks flew out of him in every direction. This has gained him all his enemies, because the majority of people don't like being electrified. It has also gained him his greatest friends, because some people like the human dynamo. He is nothing if not downright. He never "hedges" an issue. He wouldn't dream of saying about anyone: "So-and-so is questionably honest." He would say: "So-and-so is a damned scoundrel!" I was staggered by the colossal number of damned scoundrels, blackguards, miscreants and Judases to whom I was introduced, by name only, before I had been in his company half an hour. I must admit I liked it (there isn't half enough of that sort of thing in the ordinary way), and Harris praises just as wholeheartedly as he damns. The impression I got of him, then, was of a man whose every pulse and nerve was quickened to an almost delirious intensity, a man who exuded vitality as a politician exudes platitudes. Physically, he was short and thickset, not in any sense corpulent, a head thickly covered with dark hair, moustache to match, a bold jaw and aggressive nose. We talked until the early hours on every subject under the sun, and I found that he spoke about everything, from engineering to cooking, with the same keenness and relish, the same fire and curiosity.

A month later I saw him again. Davidson, the sculptor, was with him, and Simpson, the artist, too. The former had just completed a bust of Harris, at least he put the final touches to it this same evening when we went round to his studio. Harris, while standing as Davidson finished it off, regaled us with humorous incidents of his early life in America. His leg was pulled repeatedly by the other two, but he took it all in good part and went on with the yarn. Eventually the bust was baptized with whisky—everyone having been careful to baptize his own inner man previous to this—and we all rolled into the street. I now became conscious of the presence of several other people, but where they came from or who they were I hadn't the foggiest idea. In this condition (I seem to remember that Harris was the only one not, strictly, in this condition) we all entered a pub, where Harris was introduced to the barman as Shakespeare, Davidson as Michael Angelo, and Simpson as Rembrandt. They didn't quite know what to call me, so a compromise was effected between the names of Shaw and Wells, and the barman would, I feel sure, if confronted with me now, swear on his Bible-oath that my name is "Mr. Shells." Everything went very agreeably until someone decided that someone else had insulted him. Then the glass-breaking phase commenced. Now I have never been able to understand the extraordinary pleasure some men must feel at the sound of breaking glass. At any rate the custom is so frequently regarded as the jolliest part of a jolly evening that I assume Bacchus himself must have lived in a glass house. On this particular occasion I certainly intended to see the business through with as complete a sense of detachment as possible. But everything conspired to upset my *sang-froid.* First, the seat on which I sat was shattered by a blow from an iron pole, which would certainly have finished my career if it had hit me instead of the chair. Next, a spittoon (I had no idea it was such a considerable piece of furniture) came hurtling through the air, missed my head by the veriest fraction of an inch, wrecked several items of adornment in an alcove behind me and dropped with miraculous precision on the toe of a contemplative gentleman near by. The latter, with unlooked-for ferocity, seized a chair, shot past me in the direction from whence the spittoon came, and felled a perfectly innocent man to the ground with a sickening crash. Finally, the police arrived—and I have not seen Frank Harris since.

Later in the same year I heard that he had taken over the editorship of a paper called "Modern Society," and later still, I read that he had been imprisoned for libel or contempt of Court or some such thing. I tried to get permission to see him, but failed. Afterwards came the war, but I will show his attitude towards that more clearly, as it appears in some of his letters to me, when I have given the keynote to this character.

Bernard Shaw, in a letter to Harris, expressed himself on the apparently irreconcilable qualities of Harris's nature as follows:

"There is an old story told sometimes about Mazarin, sometimes about Richelieu, of a Minister's antechamber hung with pictures; those on one side being all idyllic landscapes and scenes of domestic sentiment; those on the other scenes of battle and blood and torture. The Minister, when he wanted to size up a new man, watched how he took the pictures. If he clung to the battle pictures, the Minister knew that he was a timid man of peace, for whom action and daring were full of romantic fascination. If he wallowed in cottage sentiment and the Maiden's Prayer, he was immediately marked down for military preferment and dangerous jobs.

"Have you ever known a sportsman who was ferocious? Have you ever known a humanitarian who was not ferocious? You are yourself so in love with the Sermon on the Mount, and with all aspects of gentleness and pity, that people who have never met you possibly imagine you as a Christ-like, dove-eyed figure. But has anybody who has met you personally ever described you as 'Gentle Francis, meek and mild!' The apparent contradiction of your pity for Sonia and Oscar Wilde by your buccaneering manners and occasionally frightful language is a familiar natural phenomenon."

Later, when Harris wrote to ask why Shaw had described him as a "ruffian," Shaw replied:

"You must not take my comments on your personal characteristics as sneers and disparagements. If you do you will find me an impossible man to have any relations with. I tell you you are a ruffian exactly as an oculist might tell you that you are astigmatic. I will tell you now more precisely what I mean—if I have done so already you have brought the repetition on yourself.

"Somebody in London society who likes interesting people meets you and invites you to dinner. He asks you to take in a bishop's wife. You entertain her with deep-voiced outpourings of your scorn for the hypocrisy and snobbery of the Church, finishing up with a touch of poetry about Mary Magdalene and her relations with Jesus. When the poor lady escapes to the drawing-room and you find yourself between the bishop and Edmund Gosse, you turn the conversation on to the genius of Rops, and probably produce a specimen of his work, broadening your language at the same time into that of the forecastle of a pirate sloop.

"And if you observe the least sign of restiveness or discomfort on the part of the twain, you redouble your energy of expression and barb it with open and angry scorn. When they escape upstairs in their turn, they condole with one another. Gosse says, 'My God, what a man!' The bishop says, 'Oh, impossible; quite impossible!'

"Now though this particular picture is a fancy one, it is not founded on any lies that people have told me. I have seen and heard you do such things; I have been condoled with, and have had to admit that you are a monster, and that clever as you are, it is impossible to ask anyone to meet you unless they are prepared to stand anything that the uttermost freemasonry of the very freest thought and expression in the boldest circles can venture on. Poor old Adolphe Adam used to run away from Beethoven's symphonies crying 'J'aime la musique qui me berce!' You would have run after him with a trombone blaring Beethoven's most challenging themes into his ears.

"Now intensely disagreeable as this was to our Adams and snobs and conventional people in general, it was not at all disagreeable to me. It was quite genuine and natural, like Beethoven walking truculently through the court group with his hat thrust down on his eyebrows when Goethe stood aside politely hat in hand like a good Geheimrath. When Beethoven's brother put 'Landbesitzer' (Landed Proprietor) on his visiting card, Beethoven put 'Hirnbesitzer' (Brain Owner) on his. All that was ruffianism on Beethoven's part; but it was an assertion of real values; and the man who asserts real values cannot be passed over by nobodies, or disliked by somebodies, merely because he asserts them in a ruffianly way. And your ruffianism was on the whole of this description. If it had been aristocratic insolence and impatience of self-restraint like that of C—— or D——, it would have been intolerable. As it was, I liked it.

"But—and here is the point of insisting on it as I do—it damaged you socially. It must have agonized Wilde, not merely because he was a snob and could hear Shakespeare saying, 'Harris with his teeth ever in the plump calf of prosperity,' but because he shrank from seeing nice and innocent people wounded and scorned merely because they were not geniuses. But Wilde did not greatly matter socially; what did matter was that though one could ask you to meet Julia Frankau and Lady Jessica Sykes, one could not ask you to meet Mrs. Humphry Ward. You may say 'God be praised for that! I never wanted to meet Mrs. Humphry Ward.' All the same, you cannot have a career in London as a journalist and politician unless you can be trusted to take Mrs. Humphry Ward in to dinner and leave her under the impression that you are either a very respectable or a very charming man.

"You may say that this may be true, but why rub it into you now that you are out of London? Well, you are out of London; but you have left a reputation there, part of which consists of a vague impression that in some way or other you made yourself impossible and had to go off to Monte Carlo and then to America, where you publicly shook the dust of London from your feet. People whose curiosity is roused by your writings ask, 'What was wrong with Frank Harris? Wasn't he a Jew, or a financial blackmailer-journalist, or another Verlaine, or a German spy, or something?' It is necessary to reply, 'No: he was simply the most impossible ruffian on the face of the earth,' and explain in the sense in which I have explained above. . . .

"As to myself, of course I am a ruffian. Set a ruffian to catch a ruffian. But I am only ruffianly nor-nor-west. Though it be ruffianism, yet there's method in't. . . ."

Now all this, coupled with the remarks Shaw had already made about Harris's work in his preface to "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," gives a very true idea of the man from one point of view. But it cannot be regarded as complete in another sense. What Shaw does not, apparently, see is that the Harris of "Sonia," "The Magic Glasses," and "The Miracle of the Stigmata" is just as much the Harris of real life as is the violent denouncer of wars, snobs and capitalists. The man who no doubt did terrify Wilde on occasion is the same man whose heart-felt winning sympathy drew from him those deeply intimate confessions which Harris has since given to the world. Only a man who can love greatly can feel intensely enough to lash out with a will. A naturally sympathetic man is invariably a good hater. The two things are part and parcel of the same thing, as Shaw has shown; but they exist together, in the man and his work, at one and the same time, which Shaw does not seem to realize. The too sensitive spirit masks itself before the world. Harris is supersensitive, and his mask is all the more frightening. He has pawned his own things a hundred times in order to help friends in distress (no doubt accompanying the deeds with loud and savoury oaths) and he is one of those strange, occasionally awkward, people who are quite incapable of attaching the smallest consequence to money, except for the immediate use it has in helping others or spending royally. He is indeed a monster according to all conventional standards, but his monstrosity only offends the shallow people who can't see beyond it—to the soul of greatness underneath it—and they are the people who simply aren't worth propitiating. "Harris," said Shaw on another occasion, "was born an outlaw, and will never be anything else." That is strictly true. All the higher wisdom we poor mortals enjoy comes from the few choice spirits who stand outside and above the common law.

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A man reveals himself best in his private correspondence. Here only does he "let himself go." Here only do his inner thoughts come to light, marked by his every characteristic. It was my joy to be Harris's most constant English correspondent between the years 1914 and 1919, when even his chief admirers and friends had turned their backs on him. This was not because I agreed with his attitude towards the war. Indeed I frequently wrote and criticized the views he was expressing. I suppose it was because I happen to have been born with a faculty for friendship which transcends all my other feelings. At any rate, I want him now to picture himself to my readers as I saw him all through those disastrous times. He has been neglected quite long enough. Sooner or later we must wake up to the fact that an appreciation of genius is a higher form of patriotism than a depreciation of Germans (or whatever other race we happen to be fighting). Our Shakespeares, not our soldiers, redeem us in the sight of the world. And we mustn't always be content to leave our biggest people to the justice and honour of posterity. "Future Renown" is certainly a pleasant prospect, but it isn't enough. It is not, I think, unreasonable to ask that our men of genius should be rewarded by (shall we say ?) half the comfort and security enjoyed by the secretary of a Football League.

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*September* 30, 1915.

I don't know how to thank you enough for your brave, kind, sympathetic letter: it has done me good, quickening and encouraging me in this mad world. . . . From the enclosed article, you will see that I am preaching a generous peace *even to Germans*. . . . The baser sort of English journalists say I have been bought by the Germans (to praise the French in and out of season ?). If only someone would pay me for preaching what I believe, I should rejoice. No such luck, I'm afraid. And the English at any rate ought to know that I can't be bought to praise or even tolerate what I dislike—or did the Boers pay me too, that I ruined myself defending them ?

*November* 4, 1915.

Your charming, kindly letter touched me deeply: the bolder front we turn to the world, the sorer is the heart. All my life I have been an exile; but as age comes on transplanting's like amputation, one's apt to bleed to death. Shakespeare says: "'Tis honour with most lands to be at odds." I have always felt at odds with every land, and now, were I given to self-pity, I could arrange a moving tale: friends and money lost; health shaken; universal contempt; unpopular opinions; exiled and old—

> Better men fared thus before you,
> Fired their ringing shot and passed
> Hotly charged though broke at last.

But even that is not my humour completely. Life's a noble, gorgeous gift; I accept good and ill with gratitude; luck's a blessing and ill-luck's a greater blessing still if we will but find the soul of goodness in it. Yet for the moment I'm sad and depressed, and another verse, a bitter one, rings in my memory:

> Ay, look: high heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation;
> All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain:
> Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation—
> Oh, why did I awake? When shall I sleep again?

And this:

> Be still, be still, my soul; it is but for a season:
> Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.

But the bad moment passes and my courage holds and the resolve to grow as long as I can and see as much as may be of this God's world. And so I send you greeting and thanks. They say I'm bought with German gold and living in a great apartment in the dearest hotel in New York. I stayed in the dear St. Regis three days in all, while I was searching a lodging, and at this moment I am at work as advertising agent for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, as my political opinions are generally detested in New York, and, indeed, throughout these United States. I cannot get work on any paper save by chance. On November 20th, *Collier's Weekly* will publish an article from me entitled "England's Hope," which will prove, among other things, that German efficiency is at its worst in the Army and Navy, because there it is enfeebled by German snobbery and Germany's hereditary aristocracy and hereditary Kaiser! But the British press will find in this paper another proof of "traitorism," by which the editors mean apparently unswerving loyalty to truth. I can only love any country in so far as it stands for truth and beauty and humanity, and I come perilously near hating these savage Germanic peoples with their big bellies and combative instincts. I prefer the Celts, who cherish a humane ideal and can be moved by abstract and ideal causes. . . . I'm trying to build up another home—all to begin over again; but a brave heart finds the toil a new and enchanting adventure. . . . I've learned life's chief lessons very thoroughly and it doesn't frighten me. But that the British should yell hate and fury at me because I sell myself makes me smile, even were the accusation true, for they are accustomed to expect it in their favourites. Why did Winston Churchill cross the floor of the House, take office under the Liberals and attack the Unionists? Why did Thingumbob shuffle off his belief in Free Trade and take up the cudgels for

Protection? Simply for a peerage. And these men had comparatively no temptation. They had not been ruined by illegality, broken in health by an unjust imprisonment, exiled in poverty and age. . . .

*February* 3, 1916.

It seems ages since I heard from you, though I hear of you now and again. I'm almost afraid that my war-book, "England or Germany?" must have hurt or disappointed you. Yet I say to myself that no opinion of yours would change my estimate of your character and disposition. Tired of consoling myself with reasonings, I write frankly to you: I hope I've said or done nothing to alienate you, and I am conscious of being as affectionately minded towards you as ever. This square (Washington Square) is as large as Trafalgar Square. Fifth Avenue runs into the middle of it and at the juncture there's a meaningless arch, which, however useless and in itself foolish, has in winter, when festooned with snow or gleaming with icicles, a certain æsthetic value. To-night I saw it in hard frost, the sky purple with rain of diamonds, and above the arch a cross in golden fire on the spire of some Catholic Church. This New York is hard and shallow and greedy as an old whore: the most terrible city in the world for the weakling or artist or scientist, or, indeed, any man of genius or distinction. This people loves education and endows it with an incomparable munificence, but it cares nothing for the flower and fruit and object of education—men and women of talent. Americans are appallingly purblind and self-satisfied. There! I've fired off my Jeremiad, and can now tell you I'm fairly content as advertising manager of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company and of the Union Pacific. I can run across the Continent from side to side and study the people east and west and find a little time besides for writing. . . . This war is evidently going on for at least another year—a long struggle between Rome and Carthage again, land power against sea power, a game all will lose at. . . . To-morrow I'm off to Virginia. Do tell me about London in your next: is there any suffering or are the poor better off than before?

*April* 5, 1916.

Your letter did me a lot of good: it chimed in with my thought. I've not been able to explain lately why new stories come to me so rarely now, whereas portraits of men I've known are always suggesting themselves. I've always thought the stories higher, more creative in character. Now you tell me that though my stories are of the best, still my critical portraits and biographies are better. I'm glad, though by no means so sure of their superiority as you are, for it's easier to write a "Portrait" like that of Burton or Renan than a story like "The English Saint," or "The Miracle of the Stigmata." But in one point I'm pretty sure you are mistaken. I regard it as a duty to draw the portraits of my contemporaries. I always felt that St. Paul and Ben Jonson missed the chance of their lives writing their own life-story and plays, instead of the history of the greater men whom they had met.

But it's surely different when you pass from contemporaries to those you've never met. What can I say about Balzac or Cervantes, Charles V, Napoleon or Columbus—to take only those in whom I've been especially interested—that a more careful and younger student might not be able to surpass? But no one will ever write of Carlyle or Renan or Davidson or Maupassant or Verlaine or France, in the future, without bottoming himself on my work. Every new "Portrait" I do of the Shining Ones I have known is sure to increase my readers in all the time to come; and it would surely be better for me to spend all the time I can on my own history rather than on the history of Balzac or Napoleon. The one I must know better than anyone else can ever know it. Tell me: don't you, on second thoughts, agree with me? But alas! here no one seems to want my work especially. I've hawked about my Portraits and no one will take 'em. But then these brainless Americans, filled with vain hatred of what they call my pro-German attitude, will not take my stories either: they prefer the trash and drivel of little love stories intended to excite the amorous propensities of boys and girls. . . . Bit by bit I'm getting poorer, though I'm once more after a fortune. Well, it's on the knees of the gods and I don't whimper, for their judgment must be a vindication in time. . . . Meanwhile, *Ave atque Vale*. Sometimes I think my foot is in the stirrup.

*April* 25, 1916.

I'm about to work desperately, for I've given up being advertising agent. Though the pay was good, it brought me no nearer the mark of my high calling, so I had to chuck it. Now I've got a small interest in some Unpuncturable Pneumatic Tyres. If it comes off, I'll make a "pile." If it doesn't, I must just hugger-mugger along, keeping eyes and ears and heart open for another chance, meanwhile working as hard as I can. It's the devil to begin again at 60 when you're practically unknown and altogether unappreciated; but whom the gods love, they chasten, and I don't complain. Every such experience enriches one with new knowledge, and I'm being taught in order to teach the more efficaciously. . . .

*July* 1, 1916.

I've got a magazine at last. I am going to fight for Peace and Goodwill to Men and for fair-play to all and truth. I need not tell you, I hope, that I love France more than Germany, and have always talked in that way. The Germans here would not even publish my war-book or help me to find a publisher. . . .

*August* 14, 1916.

You may find me pro-Irish and pro-French, but I'm not conscious of being *anti* anything. However, in war-time reason is at a discount and my time will probably come when men recover their partial sanity; but even then they'll hate me for having kept aloof. . . . I *hate* your being a soldier in these woeful days.

*September* 19, 1916.

I hope time may be given me to do all my work. I have a sort of belief that no one dies in this world till their soul dies, and I am afraid my time may be near at hand because I do not seem to have grown in America. There is a sort of arrest in my development through this transplantation. It is a harsh unfriendly climate for the soul—this one of New York—and I have no roots here. I put out little tendrils now and then, but they all get nipped. . . . I want the war to end. I want to get back to my frank, friendly French people again. . . . Don't be afraid of excessive hero-worship; after assimilating all of another's spirit that we need, our own ego quickly reacts and recovers its own poise and balance. As a boy, I was hypnotized by one man ten years my elder, and for two years did not regain my centre of gravity. Then I became myself again and never lost my own soul afterwards. . . . I have found it hard to live even in America. I don't mean hard to earn my living; I mean that the soul suffers, the mind withers, the sympathies are all frost-bitten in this selfish, individualist, pushing, vulgar crowd. Your warm flattering letters have helped me to face this all-hating, all-envying, all-deriding world. . . . I want to begin my second volume of "Contemporary Portraits" with Bernard Shaw, whom, like yourself, I regard as the only first-rate figure in the England of to-day. I consider Shaw's an almost ideal life. At any rate I do not know fault enough in him to make his portrait really fine, for, as I have said, the shadows must be in proportion to the high lights. I know nothing whatever against his private life, and his public services, both of courage and brains, are of the first order. I only know one person I shall find as difficult to draw, and that is Alfred Russel Wallace, who was the sweetest and noblest person I have ever met. . . .

*December* 12, 1916.

My autobiography will, of course, include intimate portraits of my contemporaries, much more intimate than I could put in print for general use. I shall not write it at all unless I am able to write it with absolute freedom and fidelity to fact. The reason I told you of Gautier's portraits was that he has written one on Balzac that puts the rest completely in the shade. I do not know how to criticize it. If I had read it before I had done my own portraits, I should have given him the credit for being first in the new field, all on the strength of this one on Balzac, which, however, has two weak points in it. It does not attempt to classify Balzac, to put him in his place among great men; nor does it give us that intimate knowledge of his relations with women which we ought to have. Gautier tells us that he is going to do it and then does not do it—a fatal gap. He does not even tell us how Balzac regarded women; he just fails to tell us what we most want to know. . . . I always put Balzac with Goethe and Shakespeare, in spite of his lack of certain artist qualities which I must love. But when you say that he interests you far more than Christ, I cannot go with you. No one to me is as great as Jesus; no one has reached his sweetness and height. . . . To say nothing of the Jesus story and Paul's Epistles, I would rather have written Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon than anything else I know. I wish I could show you pieces in them, but read them and the jewels will stand out impossible to be overlooked. Fancy a person writing of love:

> I sleep but my heart waketh;
> It is the voice of the beloved that knocketh.

I never give an opinion on books that I have not been able to read two or three times. Memory, after all, is the prototype of the good critic; simply lets the poor book drop through its meshes into oblivion and rescues the best scenes or characters of the best books.

You tell me I am able to put more creative power into real circumstances and real people than into imaginary characters. If you are right, it probably comes from the fact that I began to write late in life. My earliest short story dates from about '90 and was not written much before I was five and thirty. As one gets older, one's love of fiction diminishes and one becomes entranced by the magical possibilities of reality. One of the chief merits in me, I think, is that I love life more passionately every year I live and enjoy it more intensely. . . . We picture character through words. I should have liked to have pictured one character through deeds alone, but actions are a recalcitrant medium and such a story would be like hammered bronze.

*January* 23, 1917.

You ask me whether Wilde told me the story of the boy in the ball. ("Unpath'd Waters.") Yes, the first idea of the story came from Wilde but the ending of it, that the boy was *not* in the ball, was my idea. Wilde told it me one night very casually, saying he had a story. I said of course the boy must not be in the ball at the end, so that the man could have worsted his critics if he only had had the self-confidence of virtue, but his cheating had weakened *him* and so he came to grief. The moment I said it, Oscar jumped at the idea and said: "Oh! Frank, what a splendid ending; but that makes the story yours; I have no more interest in it; you must write it." He never wrote it, I believe, but I heard him telling it once afterwards with my addition, saying at the end laughing: "This is *our* story, Frank." So I told it, adding all the modern scientific stuff to give it probability as I thought, or to put round it a sort of haze of the actual. . . . If it had not been for English puritanism and American puritanism, I should have written better short stories than any I have done. My best love story is in "The Bomb," and even there the publisher, helped by the printer, refused to publish it unless I rewrote the love meetings and draped the figures; they simply forced me to re-do it, and I assure you it worsened it. Just because my hero was going to show absolute self-abnegation, I thought myself justified in painting the physical attraction nakedly. Then I had to cut out all the bodily urge and delightful intoxication. Of course I never saw any of the people in "The Bomb," though Shaw said he had met Mrs. Parsons when she came to London. Lingg I took from the portrait given of him in some newspapers, and I idealized him into the spirit of revolution, giving him certainly a bigger mind than he had and basing his revolt on truth as on a rock. Schnaubelt I took as the type of a first-class cultured mediocrity. Lingg is the natural instrument and helper, and I thought it significant that the lieutenant should kill others and that the master revolutionary should kill himself. The love story in the book is purely imaginary, though of course heated by my own experience, coloured by my own passion. I had drawn an American woman in "A Modern Idyll"—a coquette, who uses the cooler nature of woman to excite and madden the man. This time in Elsie I wanted to give a picture of all but the best type of woman—a creature splendidly endowed physically. Your praise makes me think of Meredith when he says in one of his letters that too much praise is not good for us; we want just enough to incite us to do our best—enough, if you will, to do better than our best, but never enough to make us persuade ourselves that in us humanity has reached its zenith. I do not know how to thank you for all your kindness to me. It has been hard to live here; so little affection in the place, so little kindness. It is like working in a devilish machine shop among strangers. I have never felt myself so outcast before. Your letters have helped me to live.

*January* 31, 1917.

You reproach me for not thinking more of Bernard Shaw, and you advise me to read him all over again and try to do justice to his genius. None of us can see all things fairly, much less all men, and our contemporaries usually come to us like the goddesses in Virgil, clothed with a mist, and alas! their movement strikes us as anything but divine: *Incessu non patuit Deus.* Of course I try to do all my contemporaries justice, especially Shaw, who is not only the greatest of them, but the only one who recognizes the chief obligation of greatness by trying to do justice to his peers. . . . I have always spoken and written of Shaw as the biggest Englishman of his time, the only original and fine mind of his day; and his character, too, is as nobly independent as his mind; but he has brought up with him from earlier years a sort of tartness which I do not care for. By the way, I am amused by discovering that he thinks the same of me, for he advises me in his latest letter, to put vinegar and not bitter into my salad. I suppose because we are both standing on somewhat the same level, and looking at much the same things, we cannot understand the tremendous discrepancies of vision. . . . You say you will never be able to see with me as to the Bible, and you scoff at divine perfection. The portrait of Jesus, you say, is "inhumanly perfect." True, true, true—but there is no chapter in all literature to me greater than the last chapter of Ecclesiastes. Job, too, is a great work, and Isaiah, and the Song of Solomon. And then there is Jesus and Paul—Paul a greater St. Bernard—the greatest of all the saints militant. And Jesus, the man who first discovered the soul and first brought love into life, made it the principle of all our actions, the Sun of all our seeing. He had imperfections enough. I always see his hands in the hair of Mary Magdalene, and she is not at his feet but on his heart. Where else did he learn "Much shall be forgiven her, for she loved much?" He made lots of mistakes, and then that final mistake, the going up to Jerusalem heralded by triumph on all the sunlit ways—"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Was there ever such a divine blunder?

*March* 27, 1917.

Another milestone on the dreadful road, another month's magazine edited. I got on board a water-logged ship in July last. Now I've stopped the big leaks and the ship is sea-worthy. A last effort and I shall probably get the last few years of my life free from money troubles and a chance to write four or five terrible and beautiful volumes of autobiography, truer and more joyful than anything yet conceived. What do you think of that? How I kissed the girls and met my peers and joyed and feasted and loved and had a great life, able every year to mark growth right up to the present time. A gorgeous delightful life which has shown me every corner of this wonderful world; for I lived in the greatest period of recorded time, saw the first airship, a ship heavier than air, rise from the ground and circle over me, with thunder of machines working, and then soar higher and higher into the blue above the startled birds while we below gazed in ecstasy through tears of joy. I saw, too, the first submarine and knew that man having conquered the sea and air would go on until he conquered ether too and could visit this star and that planet.

For the moment he could measure the movement of the stars by mathematical formulæ of his own conceiving; the moment laws in his mind are laws by which the suns grow and move and have their being, he possesses the key to the universe and can solve all problems, gratify his every desire. He is a god incarnate and can make of life what he will. And instead of realizing the vision splendid, he is intent now on murdering his fellow-man and stealing his territory and his trade, and is altogether given over to hatreds and vileness; he is making of the fairest of lands a butcher's shop, where human beings are being carved and killed by the thousand. The silly little brute. No wonder my heart grows sick—

> How long, O Lord, how long
> Shall thy servant linger;
> She who shall right the wrong,
> And make the oppressed strong,
> Sweet morrow bring her!

Never mind; the sun's still shining; love is still possible, and no one who knows what beauty is can wish to die.

*April* 30, 1918.

You ask me what I think of Wells and whether I have done any portrait of him. You say you are greatly interested in him. I was more interested in him in the beginning than in anyone, but when his great success came with "Tono Bungay" and "Ann Veronica" I found it impossible to read him. I read the first chapters of "Machiavelli" with intensest interest, and then broke off altogether. "Mr. Britling" I forced myself to read from start to finish; there are some good bits in it towards the end, a page or two that has been lived, but the whole thing is insular, over-strained, silly, and I'm sure nobody will read it in the future. I have no patience with the fellow and his nonsensical diatribes against the Germans whom he knows nothing about. Surely we can fight the Germans without shrieking filthy insults at them as if we were corner boys in a low prize-fight. It humiliates me that Wells and Arnold Bennett should be such fools. All the best books on the war have come from French sources. "Le Feu" of Henri Barbusse is worth more than all the English have written. Wells's "God" books, too, are inept; they expose his innate silliness; he writes like a bishop! When I first knew him he had a strong cockney accent and talked about "lydies," and now he puts on airs and an Oxford accent that would bear. But the man who can go so utterly wrong over this wretched war is not one of the sacred guides who steer humanity. Fancy his saying that Germany must be blotted out! I wonder how many Wellses we would sacrifice rather than blot out Germany? The chief thing about great men is that they belong to no country and hardly to any time; they may be shadows but, like all shadows, point to the sun. . . . The moral aspect of the war has changed. The shameful aggressions of the Germans in Russia, the disgraceful stealing of Batoum and Kars, and the handing over of the whole of that fertile province of Georgia to the unspeakable Turk, is one of those crimes that can never be forgiven, and for a year now I have seen that the Germans must be beaten. We go perpetually the wrong way about it, but still it will be done; so, for the first time, I am at one with my kind, and though not so savage as the majority of men have managed to make themselves, perhaps not less determined. . . . You ask for details of my daily life. I wake about eight in the morning, get a grape-fruit and a couple of cups of tea and write or dictate till twelve-thirty; then I get up and dress. I try to go out for five or ten minutes' walk or run before my lunch at one-thirty; from two-thirty to three-thirty I snoozel; at three-thirty I go to the office to see people, deal with correspondence, calls, etc.; from six to seven-thirty I take a walk if I can; then I come in and have a cup of soup, no bread; afterwards I either read or correct manuscript till one o'clock. Then I am supposed to go to bed; but if I have taken any coffee during the day, and it is a perpetual temptation to me, I probably do not sleep till three or four and pay for it by feeling tired and worn out next morning. . . .

*June* 12, 1918.

I had no idea, till I got your letter, that the Russians had behaved badly in Asia Minor. You say the Russian has done his job by "absolute savagery." I have always liked and admired the Russians immensely. The Turk has been guilty of savagery again and again—we have proofs of that—and worse savagery of all, has given himself up to mere selfish sensuality; but the Russian has done fine work and I think will found a very high civilization, though I'm afraid the Bolsheviki have bitten off more than they can chew. Still, I have met Lenin and Trotzky, and have a very high opinion of them. Trotzky spent a few hours with me the day before he left America. I begged him to be content with getting the land for the people, but he was sure that the Russian people were ripe for a complete social revolution. I am afraid he was mistaken. . . .

*August* 3, 1918.

They have given up trying to call me a pro-German here and now say I am anti-British, the one label being as absurd as the other. . . . Curious, is it not, that poor old crusted Tory Lansdowne should write so nobly in favour of reason and peace, and men with a real touch of genius like Lloyd George should write so ignobly and stupidly ? But if I said even this much they would declare here that I was writing against England : " stabbing England in the back " is the favourite American expression now. God help us all, for we have fallen on evil days and evil tongues ! Your appreciation of my work is a perpetual incentive to me, and I need some incentive. I'm tired to death and growing weary. I shan't be sorry to say the *Nunc Dimittis.* Men are more idiotic than ever !

*September* 5, 1919.

While you are fighting flies and fleas in Bagdad, I am fighting to get some money in America, so that I may return as quickly as possible to Paris and write my autobiography. First, however, I want to go round the world for the third time. I want to go through Siberia to Petrograd and see Lenin and Trotzky and their wonderful communist republic. Then I want to go to Germany —to Berlin and Dresden, then to Vienna, then to Munich and through north Italy to Paris. I want three volumes of my autobiography to be terminated by these three voyages round the world. The first that ended in '76, the next in '95, and then this third one now. Up to the entrance of America into the war I did not age in my opinion. I was just as keen about life and living as ever; filled with hope in the development of man and in his spiritual growth. Two years in America under this cursed Wilson régime have almost broken me. I do not mean in health, but in hope and belief in humanity. He is such a hypocrite, such a liar. He has debased the moral currency of the world and I want to plead for his impeachment, but I can get no one to listen. Americans care for nothing except getting rich; a pretty wife and a new motor car are all they think of. I want to get away from the thin mouths and heavy jaws and brainless greed of the Common. Bacon's great word is ever in my mouth: "The crowd incapable of perfectness." This country has taught me good things in England; that the aristocracy, besides giving the standard of manners, keeps up the standard of honour. Here there are no manners and no honour and as little honesty as possible. Oh, I am sick at heart, sick to death. But what is the use of giving a younger man my discouragements and disappointments, my doubtings and despair. The ruin of Vienna affects me as a personal injury. It was the only capital besides Paris and London that had a soul, and this Wilson has killed it. No wonder I call Wilson, George and Clemenceau, the World, the Flesh and the Devil. And now I am going to write my leader for this month's magazine—"The League of Dam-Nations by Greed out of Lies.". . . After going round the world, I will get back to Paris and spend three or four years writing these three or four volumes of autobiography, and then I want to pull the curtain down and go out. I have had enough of the show. The last act that I thought would crown all has turned the great drama into the commonest knock-out farce, and the taste of it is in my mouth and will be till I die. . . .

## VI

# LYTTON STRACHEY

THIS is a biographical age. For the first time in the literature of our country, biography as an independent art is coming into its own. Until now we have had no conscious art of biography. I say this in spite of the very obvious art in such works as Boswell's "Johnson," and Mrs. Gaskell's "Brontes." But if art means anything, it means selection; and until the year 1910 it had never entered into the head of any biographer that his work could be as free of its subject as the Venus of Milo, the Falstaff of Shakespeare, or the Philip of Velasquez. When all's said, the art of the biographer is the art of the dramatist. He has a story to tell and a portrait to paint. If the story is to grip, it must have its climax in the right place, its drama artistically presented. If the portrait is to live, it must be painted in shadows and high-lights; the many-coloured mantle of life must be shown in true perspective; hidden motives must be revealed, the mainsprings of action brought to light, the soul of man exposed to view.

When Boswell set out to write his "Life of Johnson," he started with the conscious object of getting as much of Johnson on to paper as he could. Every letter that Johnson wrote, every trivial detail of his everyday life, every comment he made on any stupid occurrence—nothing was too absurd, too slight, too redundant for inclusion. The consequence is that we get an amazing mass of material which, because of the author's narrative charm, is wonderfully entertaining, but the essential Johnson is lost in the maze. Boswell's extraordinary knack of making "good copy" has blinded his critics to the central fault of the book. It is a masterpiece of the Insignificant. . . .

Bozzy's monumental work practically laid waste the art of biography as practised by many eminent writers in the nineteenth century. Lockhart, Foster, Froude and the rest imagined (poor innocent souls!) that the Gospel must be written according to St. Boswell, and they laboured away at their dreary tomes with a painstaking solicitude which one cannot sufficiently admire—and pity! They all told at great length everything about their heroes that no one wanted to know. They succeeded magnificently in burying their giants under a mountain of facts. Until the year 1910 there was hardly a biography in the English language that would not have been improved out of all recognition by being cut down to half its published size; and even then, not one of them (except Boswell and, perhaps, Mrs. Gaskell) would be as interesting as a good novel.

The mere suggestion that a biography should be as interesting as a novel will make some people stare. But if an artist cannot make a single subject drawn from real life a thousand times more absorbing than a whole gallery of imaginative characters, he had better diet himself on opium. And that is where the whole trouble lies. We have had no artist-biographers. All our so-called great biographers have been either slavish disciples of the men they have tried to depict, or mere hack-work journalists. They have been incapable both of art and truth. They have laboriously manufactured their heroes' shrouds. . . .

Quietly, in the year 1910, the first great biographical work of art in the English language was finished. Quietly, too, privately printed and subscribed for, it was issued in 1916. The author, Frank Harris, had recreated his subject, Oscar Wilde, and unfolded the astounding drama, with an unequalled intimacy, power, vividness and truth. It established an epoch in literary history and created a biographical tradition in its kind.

Two years later, Strachey's "Eminent Victorians" was given to the world. The world received it with approbation. The world, for once, was quite right. Strachey's art—in its detached, historical, impersonal way—is just as new to our literature as Harris's. He approaches his subjects, of course, from a totally different angle; he writes as a student, not as a friend; but he has all the probing power, the high impartiality, the born story-teller's enchantment, the emotion, colour, truth, creative vitality of a supreme artist. There is, besides, a sub-current of ironic humour in his work that gives it an exquisite flavouring and supplies the personal note, the ego-element, without which any mere display of literary excellence is cold and lifeless.

Again, in his "Life of Queen Victoria," Strachey played ducks and drakes with our academical historiographers, and wrote a book as free, harmonious, independent and perfectly balanced as the finest novel imaginable. It is not just a "Life of Victoria" that happens to be a work of art, but a work of art that happens to be a "Life of Victoria." In style, treatment, construction and poise it is a masterpiece, infinitely more fascinating than any novel I know, and incomparably the greatest piece of historical biography in the English language. . . .

The man who has thus lifted biography at a bound to its rightful place among the arts is not easy to describe. Physically, he is tall and thin, and one has the impression that he is exceptionally frail. He wears spectacles, has a fairly long reddish beard and brushes his hair flat across the head. A pointed, thin nose and long, narrow face accentuate those scholarly and aristocratic qualities which his personality and his writings suggest. Perhaps the most striking thing about him at a first glance is an intense and restless nervousness. This gives him a bashful and timid manner, not without grace, emphasized by long, tremulous, tapering fingers and a high-pitched quavering voice.

Lytton Strachey is nothing if not diligent. He doesn't turn his work out with the feverish, furtive haste of most modern authors. Shortly after the appearance of "Queen Victoria," I was lunching with him at the Café Royal, and he told me that the work and study he had expended on his latest biography had left him tired out. "I have to bury myself in the country when I want to work," he said; "it isn't so much the noises of London that prevent concentration, but the constant social calls upon one's time—the exits and entrances. It has taken me three years solid work to write 'Victoria,' and I am now suffering from mental prostration."

"How does it feel to be the author of a best-seller?" I asked.

"It leaves me unmoved," he rejoined; "indeed the success of my work is beginning to make me question its merit. Can a popular author be a good one?"

"It's uncommon," I said, "but it's not impossible. Look at Shakespeare and Shaw!"

"I wonder if Shakespeare really *is* popular?" he queried.

"Not a doubt of it! Even in England!" I cried.

"You set me rather a high standard!" he returned. "By the way, have you ever read Johnson's 'Lives of the Poets'?"

"Yes and no. I read them at school, which is as much as to say I've forgotten them. Why?"

"Because you call my work entirely original. You will find in them (shall we say?) a foretaste of the Stracheyan artistry."

He appears to have a thorough-going affection for artificial writers in general, such as Congreve, and for the eighteenth century in particular. He speaks with intense admiration of Gibbon and Sterne; and he considers Boswell's Life chiefly remarkable for the sense of proximity to Johnson one is made to feel. One can almost, he says, hear the very voice of Johnson, even the *tone* of voice in which he spoke.

"Why don't you now try to give us some of the big Victorian thinkers and artists?" I asked him.

He was silent for a moment, and then, in a hesitating manner, said: "I think I shall write a play next." That set me going. He listened in silence for the next five minutes while I explained why it was vitally necessary that he should stick to a job he can do better than anyone else, and not attempt a job he couldn't hope to do as well as Shaw. At the end of my discourse he said: "Perhaps you are right."

In answer to further questions, he told me he would like to do a study of Queen Elizabeth. "A 'History of the World' wants writing, too," he remarked: "it's a job I'd like to take on. It should be printed in a single, neat, easily-portable volume. The whole thing must be a compact condensation of essential facts—not a series of moral strictures on eminent people, like most histories."

He spoke enthusiastically of Charles Darwin—a great subject for a biography, he said.

"What about Disraeli?" I questioned: "there's drama for you—and character!"

"I can't make him out," Strachey answered; "his character is so utterly contradictory. Think of his cynicism and his child-like love of place! The two things don't go together. How could such a brilliant, witty man be satisfied, beglamoured, by such a paltry thing as a Premiership? His novels are extraordinarily clever—and yet one is faced with the monstrous fact that their author fell in love with the Garter!"

"That was probably the Jew in him," I suggested: "with an Israelite, the realist and the showman go hand-in-hand. . . ."

But it isn't really of the least importance what particular subject Lytton Strachey chooses for his next work, or his next dozen works. He can relume the pageant of history and give its personalities the breath of life. In his hands a second-rate man like Cardinal Manning or Dr. Arnold can shine with all the lustre of an immortal character in romance; and a great figure like Gordon or Florence Nightingale can assume epic significance. The tedious becomes fascinating when touched by the magic of his pen.

One can only compare him with himself. He is the Strachey of biographers. . . .

## VII

## SIR JOHNSTON FORBES-ROBERTSON

AN unique, a flawless, executive artist—much too perfect to arouse vast enthusiasm or fail to get considerable applause, much too rare to score any tremendous failures or reach any colossal heights. Not a romantic, but a classical actor. Such was Forbes-Robertson. Hence his comparative failure in all the romantic Shakespearean parts he played: hence, also, his supreme success as Hamlet and Julius Caesar. These were, in fact, his only big achievements in the later years. The rest of the plays in his repertoire were unimportant and need not detain us. He did practically nothing for the stage, he gained no exceptional prestige: but he produced the greatest tragedy and the greatest historical drama in our language, acting the protagonists of both in such a faultless manner, that one simply had to realize the absurdity of criticizing either performance. Actors with not half his skill had big moments the like of which he never knew, for the little is as often great as the great is little. He never soared, never had large conceptions, but executed with absolute nicety what he understood. And, believe me, he understood Hamlet as Hamlet was never understood before. He grasped the primal truth about Hamlet: that he is not a bunch of romantic possibilities and hidden meanings. Indeed, the only thing that has never been said about Hamlet is the only thing worth saying about him: that he is the essence of simplicity. The reason that Shakespeare made Hamlet pretend madness is undiscoverable because there is no reason. Had Shakespeare been adaptable to mere reason, he would have been incapable of creating Hamlet. Genius is the most utterly unreasonable thing in the universe, but it is always simple. It is the unimaginative pedant who takes refuge in complexity. Shakespeare, like all geniuses, never left school, which means that he never ceased putting his tongue out at the professors! And every succeeding age has produced a further batch of professors (we call them critics nowadays) who have qualified for a lunatic asylum in their logical endeavours to prove that Hamlet was mad. Again and again Shakespeare spoke his heart from under the jester's cap and bells. Surely this ought to have put the academic owls and bardolatrous bats on the track of the Hamlet idea! "Invest me in my motley; give me leave to speak my mind"—this is the text for the exuberant, superabundant genius. The desire of Jacques becomes the vesture of Hamlet—just Shakespeare letting off steam, cleansing his bosom of much "perilous stuff," giving his soul an outlet through the mask of insanity. Nothing is so surely diagnostic of genius as a kind of wild, illogical gaiety.

No literary criticism of Hamlet was worth twopence by the side of Forbes-Robertson's dramatic explanation of him. The whole thing from start to finish was final in its exquisite simplicity; nothing could possibly be said from any other point of view.

Leaving entirely on one side the actor's extraordinary physical grace and the organ-music of his marvellous voice, he was the only artist of his time—I dare guess of any time—who was Hamlet in gesture and speech. He lived in the period and spoke its language. Poetry was his natural medium of expression and mediaeval dress his fitting habit. One never felt that he was assuming a period not his own or a speech foreign to his everyday conversation. He did not have to act Hamlet: he came to life as Hamlet. The character as he conceived it (having already been conceived in precisely the same manner by the author) was the embodiment of humanity's soul, not, as other actors seem to imagine, its sentiment. He epitomized the fine not the common aspirations of mankind. His was the only Hamlet who would actually have jumped into Ophelia's grave—the rest would have dropped flowers into it. What I mean is that he was more furious at Laertes' ridiculously theatrical behaviour than grieved at the cause for it. His "rogue and peasant slave" soliloquy was not devised for the purpose of calling the king unpleasant names, but in order to find a reason for his own peculiarity. He arrives at the conclusion (impolitely expressed by himself of course) that he can't behave in the usual conventional way. When he says that he is "pigeon-livered" he does not mean to imply that he is chicken-hearted, but that he is not morally respectable. In short, he discovers himself to be a man with a mind instead of a man with orthodox opinions.

If Goethe or Coleridge had seen this performance, they wouldn't have written criticisms on "Hamlet"; they would simply have said: "Go and see Forbes-Robertson." People who have been lucky enough to see it, but who still prefer the romantic *tours de force* and stage pauses of other actors, should continue or commence to patronize melodrama and musical comedy. It is just possible they may appreciate the rest of Shakespeare's plays, the majority of which are romantic melodramas or poetic-musical comedies, but they certainly can't appreciate "Hamlet." They have still to be modernized and still to get a soul. Forbes-Robertson's "Hamlet" was the only Shakespearean performance one could see twenty times (and twice in one day) yet wish to go on seeing it twenty times twenty. After which, there is nothing more to be said.

When an actor has a part written for him (as Shaw wrote "Caesar" for Robertson) one may be sure the author considers the actor worthy of it. This being so, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that no actor in the world's history was ever so highly complimented as Forbes-Robertson. Also, the highest possible praise of Robertson's art is just this: he *was* worthy of it. First, he had the Caesarian features and the Caesarian build—though I'm pretty certain Caesar hadn't his voice. Next, he was born with the Caesarian modernity and dignity; his inflections gave the essential measure of Caesar's culture and nobility.

Mommsen, in that astonishing revelation of Caesar's genius which so largely helps to give his book chief place among historical works, showing as it does a faculty for acute perception which no other historian can lay claim to, says: "If in a nature so harmoniously organized there is any one trait to be singled out as characteristic, it is this—that he stood aloof from all ideology and everything fanciful. As a matter of course, Caesar was a man of passion, for without passion there is no genius; but his passion was ever under his control." This was exactly the impression Forbes-Robertson's acting gave. He played the great statesman, letting us into his mind and way of thought so superbly, that on the strength of this performance alone, a nation of intellectual aristocrats might have made him Prime Minister on the spot. Though I ought to add that a nation of supermen would have promptly crowned Caesar's creator.

There was something haunting about Robertson's Caesar. When he bade farewell to his soldiers and to Egypt at the end of the play, one felt that the sun was undergoing eclipse, that clouds were passing over its face. Rufio and the rest stood there as the ship left the quay with shadows flickering amongst them, the light of their days burning low in its socket. Something had, one felt, gone out of their lives—and out of our lives. It was as if a friend had died. A strange thing, this—the haunting quality of art—a sure passport to immortality. Shaw makes us feel it all through, as he makes Cleopatra feel it. A wonderful personality—at once Shavian and Caesarian—moves through the play, a big influence to fine thinking and a morality far higher than the one we know.

What a splendid tribute to Forbes-Robertson! Without him, a masterpiece of art might not have ennobled an era. With him, dramatic literature has been enriched beyond present calculation; and a magnificent creation was inspired by his personal charm and the perfection of his wonderful art.

# VIII

# STEPHEN PHILLIPS

IT is strange how popularity and success can ruin a man both morally and artistically. The career of Stephen Phillips was meteoric. He shot up and he shot down. I am told he reached an equilibrium towards the end, but he went utterly out of my life in 1910, and I never even saw him again.

I sometimes question whether his work will live. Most of it was too obviously the direct product of a fleeting, though temporarily immense, success. Still, there was about his finest lyrical outbursts a quality, a sort of ecstasy, that we can hardly find matched among that ever-growing throng of poets whom we call "Minor." Undeniably he was a minor poet, but he was also, now and again, capable of a major key. "Paolo and Francesca" immediately took a definite place in English poetic drama. It was a stage success and a thing of beauty—a combination unique outside Shakespeare. And if he failed afterwards to keep the level reached in "Paolo," we must remember that there has only been one Shakespeare, and refuse to dismiss Phillips as negligible for not being another. Besides, there are some gorgeous passages in his later plays which almost atone for their otherwise bombastic structure. No poet would benefit so much as Phillips by a Golden Treasury selection. He was essentially a man of moments; and I do not think I am overestimating him in saying that he had more moments of inspired beauty than any other minor poet. Many of his phrases are tense with emotion of a very rare and exalted nature. They beat the cage of word-expression with a mighty sweep. They ring and resound in the memory. . . .

One day in the year 1909, I was dining at a café in East Street, Brighton. About half-way through the meal three men came in and took a table next to mine. Two of them had apparently been playing golf that afternoon, because I heard the third chaffing them about it, calling them typical brainless Englishmen, who couldn't use their time to better purpose than in hitting a ball about a links and chasing it. "Oh, it's all very well for you to talk like that, Phillips," replied one of the others, "but we don't write poetry, and we don't waste our time reading it." The two words, "Phillips" and "poetry," made me sit up. I turned my chair slightly to get a better view of their table, and had my first look at the author of "Paolo and Francesca." . . .

He sat with his elbows on the table, hunched-up and ungainly-looking. His proportions were Falstaffian. His belly was far too large, and he didn't know how to make the best of it. The chief points about his face were a very square jaw and a set and rather cruel expression—not unlike, I imagined, a Roman Emperor of the decadence, except for the nose.

As the dinner at the next table progressed, the conversation became louder and more acrid. The other diners in the café began to prick up their ears, and eventually the manager had to ask Phillips to moderate either his voice or his opinions. This brought a storm of abuse on the unfortunate manager's head. Phillips turned and rent him. He was informed, firstly, that he was apparently unaware of his (the speaker's) importance in the literary world, secondly that it was a public place and one did not resort to public places for the purpose of speaking in whispers, thirdly that England had often been called (wrongly no doubt) a free country, and fourthly that the wine at this particular restaurant was undrinkable ! I did not stay to hear the end of the scene, but I could hear Phillips's high, raucous voice for several yards down the street outside.

A month or two later I saw him again and experienced my first talk with him. I use the word " experienced " advisedly. To a nervous and rather hesitant youth, as I was then, a first talk with Phillips in his post-halcyon days was a rather alarming adventure ; especially when he was in his cups ; and during 1909 he was seldom out of them.

This time I ran across him in a common or garden pub, which I used to visit now and then for a game of billiards. He sat, bunched up, in a corner, with a large glass of whisky by his side. He looked very disreputable, his slouch hat drawn well over his eyes, and he seemed to glower in a semi-fuddled manner at the other occupants of the room. I took my courage in both hands and marched up to him.

"May I introduce myself, sir?" I asked.

"No, you mayn't!" he snarled back.

I turned away after that, and was just leaving the room when he shouted after me:

"Who the devil are you, anyway?"

Thus encouraged, I ventured again timidly:

"My name is Pearson."

"Don't know you," said he, and then, after a pause: "Don't want to either!"

"You are very polite," I put in.

"Go to hell!" he rejoined.

Taking our surroundings into consideration, we were getting on famously, so I decided to stand my ground.

"I know *you,* though," I proclaimed; "you are the author of some of the finest verse of the time, and I want to tell you how much I admire your work."

"Rubbish!" he answered: "that's what they all say, but they don't encourage me to go on with it. A poet in England is a fool. He is also an anachronism. England doesn't want poets. She wants Kiplings. In fact she doesn't know what she wants—and I hope she suffers for her blasted absentmindedness!"

"If you'll excuse me for saying it . . ." I began.

"I won't excuse you for anything, damn you!" he retorted.

Obviously he was not a man to waste courtesy over, so I didn't ask his leave for any further remarks I had to make.

"Then I think you should consider yourself damned lucky!" I said, adopting his lingo.

"There are a dozen poets of equal genius to yourself practically starving, or doing hack-work to keep themselves out of the gutter; while you have had success after success, greater success than any dramatic poet has had since Shakespeare. I really don't know what you have got to grumble about."

"When I allowed you to introduce yourself to me . . . ." he commenced.

"You didn't!" I cut in.

"Be silent!" he shouted. "When, I repeat, I allowed you to address me without giving myself the pleasure of kicking your backside, I imagined —God forgive me!—that you might have something to say that hasn't already been said by every Grub Street growler in the kingdom. You are talking poisonous rot, man! But I will smother my present inclination to throw a glass of execrable whisky over you, because I want you to name the dozen poets of equal genius to myself (as you so abominably phrase it) and also because you do not appear to be yet out of your 'teens."

"I mentioned a dozen at random," I replied. "But you have doubtless heard of Davidson, Watson, Noyes, Newbolt and Bridges—to say nothing of those three obscure little scribblers, Hardy, Meredith and Swinburne."

"Don't try to be funny!" he sneered: "humour is not a virtue of the cradle. You'd better be toddling home now, or your nurse will be getting nervous. Wait a moment, though! Now you *are* here, you can make yourself useful. Get me another whisky."

"Delighted!" I said: "I had no idea poets could be such charming companions." And without waiting for an answer, I went to the bar and ordered his refreshment. When I came back, he appeared to be half-asleep, and I had to poke him in the ribs before he was aware of my return.

"You still here!" he cried. "Whatever will Mammy say?"

"Drink that, you fat-gutted old beast," was my not altogether genteel rejoinder, "and then say your prayers." After which suitable remark I quitted the pub without more ado.

This was not a particularly brilliant start-off for an acquaintanceship. I certainly did not intend to continue it. But fate intended it otherwise. I saw him again and again after that, and nearly always he addressed me with a mixture of politeness and rudeness. Here are a few of his odd sayings that have stuck in my memory:

"Hullo! Still studying the poets? Why not try to climb Parnassus yourself? If you look in your atlas, you will find Parnassus in the heart of Germany. The railway porters of that country read Shakespeare. Have a drink!"

"The only truly generous people in the world are drunkards."

"I can't understand the pleasure some folk derive from motoring. I don't go into the country to enjoy man-made mechanism. And I don't want to be jolted until I'm in my coffin."

"The romantic attitude towards life leads to the Thames or to Hanwell. Christ was crucified because Jerusalem had neither. I prefer a public house to both."

"I wrote 'Paolo and Francesca' for love, 'Herod' for popularity, 'Ulysses' for money, and 'Nero' for all three."

"The whole art of argument is to assume that the other man doesn't know what he is talking about."

"A love of stomach is the beginning of wisdom."

One day I asked him what was the meaning of the line in "Paolo": "O! and that bluer blue—that greener green!"

"I haven't the least idea," he confessed: "I am a poet, not a statistician."

At last I got to the soul of the man. It was a rainy, boisterous day towards the end of the year. I had caught sight of him just as he was turning into a side street off the Brighton front. His loose cape, with mackintosh beneath, ballooned from the massive shoulders as he struggled round the corner. Having nothing better to do, I followed him into his den. He was reasonably polite, if at first a trifle morose. We drank one another's healths and sat down by the fire. With the exception of a mouldy-looking old gentleman, who was busy muttering to himself in another corner, we were alone. I started the ball rolling.

"Why did you suddenly break away from lyrical poetry and begin writing rhetorical verse?"

"Why did Shakespeare?" he parried.

"He didn't—not in the sense I mean. There is even a strong lyrical current beneath the stilted style of his last plays. He remained a poet to the end—even in prose."

"And is there no poetry in my 'Nero,' my 'Sin of David'?" he asked.

"Yes; of a high-falutin, pretentious kind. But it's the work of a poet who's running away from poetry, not of a poet whose poetry is running away with him."

"Ah, but I had to take time by the forelock, and a poet should never woo the success I sought after." He mused a while, and then went on: "Every man has a turning-point in his career. It's merely a question of whether he keeps to the path he set out on, or side-tracks his ideals. My turning-point came immediately I had written the last line in 'Paolo.' Every rhythm in that play I felt, every touch of true poetry in it was a part of myself. I, too, loved as Paolo loved. This was my very *cri de cœur*—" and he recited the lines:

O God, Thou seest us Thy creatures bound
Together by that law which holds the stars
In palpitating cosmic passion bright;
By which the very sun enthrals the earth,
And all the waves of the world faint to the moon.
Even by such attraction we two rush
Together through the everlasting years.
Us, then, whose only pain can be to part,
How wilt Thou punish? For what ecstasy
Together to be blown about the globe!
What rapture in perpetual fire to burn
Together!—where we are is endless fire.
There centuries shall in a moment pass,
And all the cycles in one hour elapse!
Still, still together, even when faints Thy sun,
And past our souls Thy stars like ashes fall,
How wilt Thou punish us who cannot part?

He recited musically, in a high-pitched monotone, with a keener feeling for sound than for sense. When he came to the end, he paused for a few seconds. Then, weighing his words with a care not at all characteristic of him, he proceeded:

"But I couldn't keep to that level in poetry or in life. I wasn't strong enough. Things happened. Stupid, vexing things. And I was ambitious. I wanted renown. . . . I love life too well—the good, comfortable things of life. I sacrificed my poetry for pounds and pence. Though (who knows ?) perhaps I had no more of the real stuff in me. A poet must live his poems; and when he ceases to live them, he ceases to write them. . . . I lost the poetry of life shortly after 'Paolo' was written, and a hunger for the easy, pleasant things came in its place. Since then, I have written my dramas for money—only money. And why not ? It's the next best thing to love."

I suppose I had, in a dim sort of way, divined as much as he told me, because I remember feeling no surprise at it. He was simply a sensualist, a full-blooded, passionate sensualist, who, whether in love or in drink, indulged himself to excess. He was greedy for life's primitive sensations, and his desires were too violent to be controlled. This explained to me also his sudden falling off in poetry. The desire for the high-sounding phrase had over-topped his purely lyrical gift and he gave way to it, just as in life he had allowed the coarser things to force back the gentler. He wallowed in the majestic phrase just as he wallowed in strong drinks.

We talked a great deal that afternoon, and it was about 7 o'clock when we parted. He touched upon several things of a still more intimate nature, but they shed no further light on his character, so there is no point in repeating them here. . . .

The last time I saw him was in 1910, when I found myself by his side at the counter of the Brighton post office. We were both buying stamps, and while he was fixing one on to an envelope he remarked: "Disgusting business, this stamp-licking! Why can't we run the postal service without filling our mouths with gum?" I recommend the suggestion to our social reformers.

Let me, finally, try to do justice to Stephen Phillips. I have already spoken of his later plays, and his "Faust" and "Armageddon" show poetical poverty even more unmistakably than "Ulysses." There is, however, a stern simplicity and restrained beauty about his very last work, "Harold," that speaks more eloquently than report of sounder living towards the end.

But, when every allowance is made and the account finally balanced, it is "Paolo and Francesca" that people will remember him by. Shortly after his death, Mrs. Meynell tried hard to make out that his best work was in the 1897 "Poems." But it's no good! The man who wrote the most exquisite love-duet in the language outside "Romeo and Juliet," is not likely to be remembered for anything less wonderful. This is where Stephen Phillips gained our first and lasting gratitude. Listen to the liquid loveliness of it:

P. Now fades the last
Star to the East: a mystic breathing comes:
And all the leaves once quivered, and were still.
F. It is the first, the faint stir of the dawn.

P. So still it is that we might almost hear
The sigh of all the sleepers in the world.
F. And all the rivers running to the sea.

* * * * *

P. Remember how when first we met we stood
Stung with immortal recollections.
O face immured beside a fairy sea,
That leaned down at dead midnight to be kissed !
O beauty folded up in forests old !
*Thou* wast the lovely quest of Arthur's knights—
F. Thy armour glimmered in a gloom of green.
P. Did I not sing to thee in Babylon ?
F. Or did we set a sail in Carthage bay ?
P. Were thine eyes strange ?
F. Did I not know thy voice ?
All ghostly grew the sun, unreal the air
Then when we kissed.
P. And in that kiss our souls
Together flashed ; and now they are as flame,
Which nothing can put out, nothing divide.

And the deathless pathos of Giovanni's last lines :

She takes away my strength.
I did not know the dead could have such hair.
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep !

## IX

## FRANK BENSON

KING GEORGE V knighted him, but for the purposes of this article I shall dub him squire. He was known all over the country as F. R. Benson, and by the members of his own company affectionately as "Pa." On a man like Benson, knighthood confers no honour and no dignity. In fact, since the honour became synonymous for success in the making of soap, butter, hair-oil, and kindred commodities, artists who have yielded to the temptation have merely vied with one another in proclaiming the relative unimportance of their art—or at least its similarity to canned food and their own likeness to that growing class of universal providers whose chief quality is that they provide everything except what is wanted. I'm not idiot enough to suggest that a special honour should be invented for artists, for the very excellent reason that if such a thing existed all the wrong people would get it. At any rate, let it be said once for all that Benson honoured his brother knights; they did not honour him. I admit the honour would have been the other way about if they had been forced to sit through one of his ordinary tragic performances, though he could act with dignity and moderation on rare occasions—but the chief point to remember about Benson's work is not what he personally did but what he generally aimed at doing.

As a boy at school, I used to love his acting, largely perhaps because I couldn't understand a word he ever said. There was a mystery about it all which wrapped Shakespeare up in a chaotic glamour and served as a splendid antidote to the tedious, prosaic business of repetition in the classroom. No quite natural acting could possibly have done this. I owe it to Benson, then, that Shakespeare was not killed for me at an age he is usually killed for the majority of boys. Benson saved Shakespeare for me off the stage by simply murdering him for me on the stage. Later, when I came to manhood, and after seeing such splendid things as Robertson's Hamlet, Tree's Richard II and Waller's Hotspur, I had another peep at Benson. Age cannot wither the memory of that lamentable Macbeth, that execrable Hamlet. I immediately understood why Benson had been practically bankrupt on several occasions, and why his performances had made Shakespeare a household word in the provinces, and why Hamlet thought it necessary to teach actors how to act—and a dozen other things. It was really quite dreadful—an infinite monotony. Benson, who produced all our best Shakespearean actors, himself the "horrible example." He should have said: "Do you wish to learn how to act? Well, mark me and I will show you how not to do it. Note my manner of speech—and go and do thou otherwise!"

But personal triumphs are small and of little account beside the higher issues of art, and Benson will be remembered—deserves to be remembered—in England as that man who above all others in our theatrical history realized a mission. He was the only actor who ever spread Shakespeare broadcast in these islands. His companies, at least when I was at school, gave the best all-round performances one could ever hope to see; infinitely better than one could see in first-class West End productions, in which by the way nearly all the best performers were old Bensonians. He taught his people that the important thing was to make themselves heard. "Seek ye first a clear and rapid elocution," he said, "and all other things will be added unto you." Or, in other words, "Don't mumble and don't be dull." And his own outrageous bawling may have been the direct outcome of this republican lesson. If so, I for one was willing to suffer the pain of listening to it—though I sometimes wish he had spouted through a sponge.

Of course Benson made the usual mistake of acting all the chief parts himself, and thus in a sense undermining the force and fineness of his mission. But this was simply a part of that vanity which seems inseparable from the individual members of his profession. I should have done much the same thing myself.

Benson felt his mission, felt it so sincerely that he was always dreaming about it. It wrapped him up in a sort of Quixotic cloak. It pervaded his acting, making him misquote nearly every other line of his parts. It found expression in all directions: the Pageant revival, Morris dancing, mediaeval street processions, banner-waving, folk-songs, early music, athletic sports, and a general picturesqueness which he associated with the rollicking days of Eliza. He was blessed with entire belief in his religion and was therefore exceptionally happy. I loved him for that. There was about him a winning simplicity and childish enthusiasm altogether attractive. Indeed, the inner man was faithfully reflected in the outer. I never met anyone who had such a charming, naïve address, such a courteous, engaging manner. It seemed a natural part of himself, not acquired but instinctive. He would, I think, have made a first-rate constitutional monarch—was, in fact, born for the part. After years of work, which included not a few trials and tribulations, he remained the same unspoilt, ingenuous darling of nature.

His histrionic defects were, as I have said, considerable, but in spite of these he must go down to history as Shakespeare's most devoted stage-disciple—a man whose singularly noble ideal enriched his native land with an artistic impetus as rare as it was beautiful.

## X

## ROBERT ROSS

A LITTLE, pleasant, bald-headed man, with quiet ways, a slightly baffled expression and a subdued air—that is how Robert Ross first appeared to me. Later he charmed me by his unexpected, rather parenthetical, turns of witty speech and sudden gleams of humorous comprehension. With curious insight into character he could make a man live again in a few well-chosen phrases, and hit off his mannerisms with cameo-like effect.

I cannot imagine a more delightful, entertaining companion at a quiet dinner than Robert Ross. Sometime in 1916 he asked me to dine with him at Prince's, and I spent one of the most enjoyable evenings of my life. It was dawn before I left his chambers in Half Moon Street, where we had spent the midnight hours after dinner, and I reached my billet too late (or too early) to arouse the suspicions of the guard.

To look at him, no one would imagine that he had been one of the leading actors in the succession of tragedies and tragi-comedies that had followed the hounding of his great friend, Oscar Wilde, from public life. He had, if anyone ever had, a restful personality. And yet, I suppose, no one was ever made to suffer as he was for a lifelong loyalty and an undying affection. That loyalty, that affection, was its own reward. He gained no other; but, instead, he was subjected to an unending series of calumnious attacks and malicious insults that have no parallel in the annals of envy and hatred.

Many things he told me that night I cannot, of course, repeat, but several other things may be of general interest and can't do much harm by repetition.

Speaking of Oscar Wilde he said:

"His wife was quite unsympathetic towards him. This will give you an idea of her. Oscar was always the essence of charm and good nature, and would never do anything to disappoint her. One day, when I was with them at Tite Street, she asked him if he would come in for lunch on the following day, as some old Dublin friends (a clergyman among them) were coming to see her and very much wanted to meet him. Oscar, to whom this sort of thing was the reverse of attractive, said: 'All right, my dear, if Bobbie can come as well.' Of course she asked me, though I knew she didn't want to, and it was then and there arranged. We found his wife's friends the typical provincial sort, full of their own local news and nothing much else. Oscar talked during lunch as I never heard him talk before—divinely. Had the company included the Queen and all the Royal Family, he couldn't have surpassed himself. Humour, tale, epigram, flowed from his lips, and his listeners sat spellbound under the influence. Suddenly in the midst of one of his most entrancing stories—his audience with wide eyes and parted mouths, their food untasted—his wife broke in: 'Oh, Oscar, *did* you remember to call for Cyril's boots?'

"Oscar could never be got to speak about his childhood; in fact he rarely, if ever, spoke of his own life at all. But, very strangely, just after he came out of prison, for several days he continually reverted to his boyhood. Reggie Turner and I were, of course, burning to hear all about his life in prison, and we were perpetually bringing his thoughts back from the one topic to the other. Neither of us can remember a single thing of importance concerning his early days that he then told us, and I am always blaming myself for the omission—though perhaps it was natural under the circumstances. Two very slight things linger in my memory, and that is all. The first was that he once ran away from home or school and hid in a cave. The second was that he and his brother used to fish in a lake: 'It was full,' he told us 'of large melancholy salmon, which lay at the bottom of the lake and paid no attention to our bait.'"

I had often thought that the most characteristic things Wilde ever wrote were his private letters, and I asked Ross why he didn't publish a good selection. He answered:

"The question of the Wilde letters has often been discussed, but for the moment must be postponed *sine die.* Douglas, who proposed at one time to publish those belonging to himself, was injuncted by me from doing so, because the copyright of them belongs to the Wilde estate, which I administer for the children. On finding that he could not make money out of them in that way, he sold the originals to Quaritch, and I believe they have gone to America; in any case, I would not, of course, hold any communication with him on the subject. Sherard, I know, must have sold most of his, as they have been on the market at various prices for a good many years. At one time I actually contemplated carrying out your suggestion, but I found, much to my disappointment and dismay, that nearly all those who had corresponded with the author prior to 1895 had destroyed all his letters, the Burne-Jones's and the Acton's among others. They even destroyed many of his manuscripts which he had given them. After the release in '97 he wrote intermittently, but too often about private matters which could not be published; and it is true to say that he was never, except when a very young man, a constant correspondent."

"What do you think of Frank Harris's biography of Wilde?" I asked him. "Personally I don't think there's anything in biographical literature to touch it as a breathing pulsating creation."

"I wrote to Harris," he replied, "directly I received the book, saying that it was 'a portrait by Franz Hals, not Frank Harris.' The portrait is a terribly faithful one—at all events of Wilde in certain aspects. I wish it could have been more comprehensive; but the materials are not accessible, because the indispensable co-operation of those who knew Wilde long before Harris or I did would not be available. I agree with you that as a biographical sketch it is unique.

Indeed the only criticism I would make is that in presenting as he does so admirably the spirit and matter of Wilde's talk, he sometimes uses a vocabulary and phraseology that Wilde would never have used. Harris has too much personality to be a quite faithful chronicler in this respect. But it is a minor point, and the truth and power of the portrait as a whole make the book, to me, rather painful. Some of the incidents Harris describes (the 'gamin' scene in Paris, for example) are so vividly characteristic that I could swear they happened exactly as narrated, even though I wasn't present at the precise episodes given. If you are writing to him, do please convey my best thanks and most sincere admiration of his work."

Somehow I had got the impression that Ross was a very keen Catholic, and was amazed when he told me that he was a confirmed Atheist. "But weren't you responsible for Wilde's death-bed conversion?" I asked. "Oh, I was a Catholic in those days right enough," he replied, "though I most certainly was not responsible for Wilde's conversion—in fact, I wasn't a bit keen on it, as it wouldn't have suited his constitution and no priest could possibly have listened to his confessions in a becoming frame of mind. No, he made me promise to bring a priest when he was no longer in a fit condition to shock one, which I did. The truth is I left the Roman Church when Douglas entered it. I felt it wasn't big enough to hold both of us."

I was very lucky that night. In the course of conversation, and split up between innumerable little bits of jollification that had nothing to do with the subject, I managed to get Ross's final words on the labour that had chiefly occupied his curiously unselfish existence; and his valedictory remarks, so to speak, on the one interest of his lifetime that will as surely gain him posterity's gratitude as it shortened his own lease of years.

I will put it all down here, not, as I have said, exactly as I first received it from him, but without the hundred and one asides and comments which made it flow easily in ordinary conversational channels at the time. He afterwards read and approved the result of my Boswellian ardour, precisely in the form in which I now give it to the reader.

"I do not agree with the views of Harris, Shaw or Moore, on Wilde or his writings. The interest of Wilde appeals quite differently to different people, as I have tried to explain in the Preface to the 14th edition of 'De Profundis.' The point of Harris's book is that it is *his* view. As Wilde said, 'Attitude in Art is everything,' and 'The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.' All I have to say myself on the subject is included in the various Prefaces I have written to his works, purposely and deliberately concealed in as few words as possible.

"Alfred Douglas indeed objected to what he called my 'detached and patronizing attitude' about Wilde's writings. But I will confess to a certain craft in exercising a reticence which

I do not propose to break. In the first place, my views of Wilde as a writer would not be regarded as of any importance; and my views of Wilde as a man would be regarded as too biassed. The latter objection would hold with regard to his writings, even if I were accepted as literary critic of any kind. Douglas and Crosland sought vainly to discover some word of approval of Wilde or his life among my sparse contributions to literature on the subject. That they failed to do so was one of the most gratifying tributes I have ever received; but apart from that, I always calculated that if I said nothing the reviewers of the new editions would not have anything to contradict, and would be compelled to discuss for the first time Wilde's books on their own merits. In his lifetime the reviewers merely reviewed his life and opinions. My plan, I am pleased to say, has succeeded.

"I must admit that my attitude is a little like that of Watts Dunton towards Rossetti. Indeed, in darker moments I feel another Watts Dunton, without complementary Swinburne to occupy my old age. But let me say this to you, under the seal of publicity, with regard to the viewpoints of Shaw and Moore, I would never accept the criticism of another Irishman on any Irish writer, living or dead. The Irish are the best critics in the world on Greek, Latin, German or English authors. They dislike each other too much to be good critics of themselves.

"Wilde was quite incapable of judging Shaw, whose facility and originality he undoubtedly envied and admired; or Moore, whose industry and perception dazzled him more than he would admit; just as Moore and Shaw, who, of course, disliked Wilde, are possibly irritated with the interest which Wilde's work excites among their contemporaries, particularly as they honestly do not admire the work.

"Now about Douglas's book entitled 'The myth of Oscar Wilde.' The only myth was that invented by Douglas himself and subsequently maintained by his family. I certainly never contradicted the myth and always allowed ample room for credence in the Preface to 'De Profundis' already mentioned; but Douglas became so enthusiastic that I suppose he began to believe the myth himself. Its entire untruth was settled in the Ransome case, not merely by the verdict of the Jury in Ransome's favour, but by Douglas's own letters, one of which Harris quotes with such excellent effect, and by his admissions in the witness-box.

"When Douglas inherited £25,000 from Lord Queensberry in the early part of 1900, Wilde still being alive, I asked him to pay off Wilde's debts and thereby acquire copyrights, which I offered to administrate on his behalf until he was repaid. Instead he bought a stud at Chantilly and got through the money in less than six months. What happened afterwards Harris has recorded in his own vivid and inimitable way with absolute truth.

"But Douglas never forgave either himself or me for having rejected such a very good business proposal. As years went on he became frankly jealous at the prestige which I obtained for having rescued Wilde's estate from bankruptcy, and he was envious at the not inconsiderable proceeds which, if he had accepted my offer, would have been his. That was the real basis of our final quarrel. . . . With the active assistance of his cousin, George Wyndham, he then began that series of actions, hoping not merely to turn the tables on me, but to repatch his threadbare reputation for loyalty.

" Why George Wyndham should have played a prominent part in the business is not, as Sir Thomas Browne says, beyond all conjecture; but that is another story which will have to be written some day.

" The function which I set myself in 1900 was to try and get the books and plays a fair hearing and a fair reading, and to obtain some benefit from their sale for Wilde's children. My friends, and particularly Frank Harris, have been more than generous in recognizing the success of my efforts, but I really think my function has now come to an end, and if I feel too complacent it is Harris and others who have made me so by their exaggerated tributes to me.

" To parody one of Wilde's jests with which you are doubtless familiar, there are two ways of disliking Wilde and his works. One way is to dislike them. The other is to say that Robert Ross was too kind to his children."

## XI

## PLAYWRIGHT PRODUCERS

PLAY-PRODUCERS are a race apart. Few other classes of the community have the opportunity of being so popular or so unpopular, so loved or so hated. They are absolute despots; but the popular ones among them have established benevolent autocracies, the unpopular ones malevolent oligarchies. Unfortunately this state of affairs can never be remedied until actors and actresses are born again, and become a quite different set of individuals from what they are at present. An ochlocracy on the stage is unthinkable as long as the artists consider their parts more important than the plays they are acting in.

Autocratic play-producers are therefore a necessary evil—the more autocratic the better until our artists become socialized.

Perhaps the best producers in the world are the authors of the plays produced. It is consequently up to every professional producer, if he wants to keep his job, to prevent the author from opening his mouth at rehearsals. Once let it be realized that the author is the only person who can, and should, produce his own play, and the days of the professional producer will be numbered. Of course the author, unless he has mastered all the technicalities of stage production, must have a scenery and lighting expert at command; but that will simply mean the substitution of professional producers by professional technicians.

As things go at present, very few authors are allowed to tamper with their own works. There are, as far as I know, only three playwrights of recent years who have managed to get matters entirely into their own hands: Bernard Shaw, Sir Arthur Pinero and Granville Barker. And of these only Granville Barker has made a profession of the business—that is to say, he has produced other people's plays as well as his own. The rest of our leading dramatists—John Galsworthy and Sir James Barrie for example—content themselves with a few grandmotherly hints here and there to producers and actors alike.

I don't suppose, if you searched theatrical history from the time of Shakespeare to the present, you would come across two men who differed more in their methods of producing plays than Shaw and Pinero. When I say that they differ in method, I ought to qualify the statement by adding that their plays require a different kind of acting. They both write plays with a purpose, but the purpose of Shaw's plays is to make people think, while the purpose of Pinero's plays is to make people pay. The former asks his actors to realize what they are saying; the latter asks his actors to make the audience realize that something is being said.

Now the obvious result in the case of Shaw is that he mustn't lose his temper; he often has to explain what he is driving at, and one can't shout explanations. But the equally obvious result in the case of Pinero is that the more he shouts the better he gets his effects: that is to say, the actor sometimes shouts back at him, which is precisely what he wants—or rather what he is positive his audience wants.

I remember once when Pinero lost his temper (and, which was more to the purpose, found his voice) he bellowed at someone: "I can't hear a damned syllable! For God's sake speak up!" The actor, enraged, literally howled his next line, which was something like: "Don't talk so loudly; they'll hear what we say." There was a feeling of restraint about the theatre for the rest of that day.

"Too confidential," Pinero once said to me; "don't forget the back row of the gallery." Another time, after the curtain had fallen on one of the acts, he came on to the stage, walked about darkly in a Napoleonic manner for a while, and then said: "I'm glad you are all enjoying the play; I've heard it's an excellent one, and I'm sure it's too good to keep altogether to yourselves. Don't be so selfish. Let me have some of it." And he marched back to the stalls, the curtain went up, and the act was played over again.

Pinero is mad on details: positions to a square inch, movements, inflections of voice, above all syllabic perfection in speaking the text. He treats his performers like a lot of babies. (He used to take Sir George Alexander through his part like a child.) He has a deep-rooted belief that actors can't think for themselves. He has been one himself, so he ought to know! I think someone must have told him that he resembles Napoleon, or his aping of the Emperor may be unconscious. At any rate, he walks, head forward, in short, quick steps, one hand behind his back, and glowers at one under bushy and autocratically-puckered eyebrows. He is very short, inclined to stoutness, and has a deep voice that would be useful during a cannonade. He smokes cigarettes interminably—never has one out of his mouth for five consecutive minutes—and for some reason best known to himself, he never takes his gloves off.

The Pineronian method has, nevertheless, for all its unbending theory of divine right of authors, one distinct advantage over the Shavian. Pinero's minute attention to every detail, though often ridiculous, is extended to the "small part" people; and there is great merit in this. Shaw never bothers himself much over the small parts. I suppose he imagines anybody can fill them adequately enough, but he is mistaken. I have acted both large and small parts, and I hereby put on record for the guidance of future producers that the small part is much the more difficult of the two. You may fail with a large part in fifty places, but there are fifty more places where you can make a dazzling success. A large part covers a multitude of sins. That is what critics mean (though they don't know they mean it) when they say that no actor ever completely fails as Hamlet. If a man fails in every scene as Hamlet, the sooner he adopts pig-sticking as a trade the better! The thing is morally and physically impossible for anyone with half an ounce of brains or imagination. But a small part is quite another matter. You've got to get "right there" in a dozen lines or so, and the united brains of actor, author and producer should be concentrated on the single question of How to do it.

Now, if you are playing a small part, Shaw will just correct you and then leave you to your fate. He presupposes exceptional intelligence at £3 a week, and if you don't show it he probably says to himself: "God help the blithering idiot—*I* shan't!" All the same, I would rather suggest a "reading" of something or other to Pinero than to Shaw. I would feel that Shaw has a contempt for mere technicalities. He wants the brain sound and doesn't mind if the legs wobble!

It is strange that Pinero, the theatrical, should sit in the front row of the stalls, and that Shaw, the confidential, should sit in the front row of the dress circle, at rehearsal. In view of what I have said, one would imagine Pinero behind the gallery, if not in the street outside, and Shaw in the wings, if not walking about among his characters on the stage. I can only suppose the former stuffs his ears with cotton wool and the latter uses an ear-trumpet.

When the curtain has fallen on an act at rehearsal, Shaw comes round to the stage with a volume of notes made during the performance.

He then takes each actor, quite personally and intimately, through the notes that concern him. Pinero, on the contrary, remembers all the faults in an act when it is finished by going through it again, with himself of course strolling about on the stage—Tableau: Napoleon at St. Helena. He then pulls you up at particular places, after first giving you a hint that you were, all through, too quiet, and says: "Ah, yes; this is where I want you to turn slightly to the left, walk slowly to a position exactly behind the centre of the sofa, three feet from it, put one hand in your right coat pocket, scratch the lower part of of your chin with the other hand, and say 'Oh!' three times . . ." or something to that effect.

Only once, I believe, has Shaw had nothing to do with the London production of one of his plays—until the eleventh hour. Barker produced "Androcles and the Lion" while Shaw was away on a holiday, and things went fairly smoothly for several weeks—until, in fact, we started dress rehearsals. Then the author turned up and proceeded to alter the greater part of Barker's "business," keeping us all up till about 3 a.m. Such small regard for others struck me as curious in Shaw, since he is in so many respects the ideal producer: his manner is ingratiating, he never loses his temper, he is very helpful, very kind, very unselfish. He usually gets his way without the slightest friction, though I remember seeing Barker on the occasion just mentioned sitting with a face of whimsical dejection as he watched G. B. S., who, with angelic sweetness, was calmly undoing the work of weeks. Another thing greatly in Shaw's favour: he never makes one nervous, and to an actor this quality alone would outweigh (if he had them) a thousand crimes of colossal magnitude.

To each his due. Pinero wouldn't dream of keeping his company busy till the small hours, and the question imposes itself: Is it better to be treated like a machine, with clock-work punctuality to match (Pinero-Alexander), or to be treated like a human being, with irregular hours as payment for your pliability (Shaw-Barker)?

I would like to tell you of the gems of scintillating wit that one would naturally suppose drop by the score from the mouth of Shaw at each and every rehearsal. But in this respect (I must apologize for destroying the illusion) he very much resembles the average man. In short, he conducts his business in a business-like manner.

There is really nothing more to be said about Shaw and Pinero at rehearsal. They would both doubtless improve over a bottle of champagne. Rehearsing is too sorry a business to induce souls to blossom forth like flowers to the view, and an author is invariably at his worst when he is in a state of excitement over his own work.

* * * * *

Granville Barker is the greatest producer of his time in England. Without people being altogether aware of it, he has revolutionized stage production in this country. I don't know enough about it to explain how or why. I simply know that he has. His work is always distinguished for its detail. There are no rough edges in his productions, and his companies are always the best for what is known as "team work" in London. Even his "stars" have taken their proper place in the planetary system; they haven't been allowed to dazzle the lesser constellations out of existence.

His method of producing is, on the whole, Shavian. He takes things quietly and talks matters over intimately. But he has some curiously anti-Shavian lapses from grace. For one thing, he gets annoyed—and shows it. Shows it in a very terrifying manner. His curses are neither loud nor deep: they are atmospheric. It is what he doesn't say that paralyses one. He *looks*; and having looked, he turns his back to the stage—and you can still see him looking through the back of his head. You feel that he is saying quite a lot of things to himself, saying them thoughtfully and witheringly—annihilating things. You wish he would turn round and say them aloud. You wish he would assault you with whatever consequences to yourself. You wish he would do anything rather than imitate a potential earthquake. Sometimes he will execute a little dance, a quiet, solitary waltz with ghastly possibilities. That is when he thinks you are quite unimaginably shocking in your efforts to get what he wants. It would be a grave mistake to speak to him at those moments. The best thing to do is to hide yourself from him completely until he calls you back. By that time he will have recovered, and will be quite charming. Perhaps he will take you by the arm and call you his "dear friend." Later, you will ask someone what happened after you had gone away. You will be told that nothing happened—nothing whatever! That is the appalling thing about Barker. Nothing happens. But all sorts of things are *going* to happen. He is the supreme artist of Suggestion.

Like all exceptional men, he has his fads. One of them is that he expects his artists to suggest things in their parts as well as he can suggest other—more terrible—things at rehearsal. To give an example. He was rehearsing me for the part of Valentine in a revival of "Twelfth Night" that didn't mature. Valentine has a speech in which he gives a message from Olivia to Orsino. I, very naturally, rendered the speech exactly as given me by (presumably) Maria. The actual words are: "But from her handmaid do return this answer." But that wasn't good enough for Barker. Oh, no! He explained to me at great length, and (I regret to say it) quite unconvincingly, that part of the speech was Maria's own, that Malvolio had probably touched it up in places, and that Sir Toby Belch had unquestionably put a phrase in here and there. He didn't tell me how all this was to be suggested, short of imitating the voice and manner of the various authors, so I failed to give it Barker-justice. He ruffled his hair, executed a *pas de seul*, and eventually (not, I hope, on account of me) substituted another play.

After a play is launched on the public, Barker will sometimes take it into his head to watch it, unseen, from some obscure corner of the theatre; and then amuse himself by sending little notes to members of the cast containing such cryptic sentences as: "You are acting. Why?" or "You are not acting. Why not?" or "How serious you are getting!" or "Remember this is a comedy."

Granville Barker was the directing artistic spirit behind the most famous epoch in theatrical management since the days of the Globe on Bankside. His name will be wedded to Shaw's in the history of the English theatre. Without him, it is possible that Shaw would never have obtained his English audience. The Vedrenne-Barker tenancy of the Court Theatre is the most shining event in the story of our drama since the time of Shakespeare.

That is fine enough achievement for a man without the additional lustre of personal dramatic triumphs. But his own plays were, and to some extent still are, notable. He suffered of course, like the rest of his compeers, from following in the footsteps of Shaw—the spiritual father of all our 'repertory' dramatists, if one may call them so. All the same, he brought a kind of ironic seriousness to his work which struck a sufficiently individual note to give him a niche to himself. I must confess I can't read his plays with much enjoyment, but I was delighted with "The Voysey Inheritance" when I saw it, and "Waste" was quite a good political pamphlet.

Some day the chronicle of our drama in the first decade of this century will be written. It had its exceptional features, quite apart from the plays of Shaw, and Barker will be found to take his rightful place in that chronicle as a very eminent Edwardian.

# POST-IMPRESSIONS

## H. G. WELLS

A MAN who writes a book about present-day personalities and leaves out H. G. Wells does an injustice to posterity. A hundred years hence people will want to know why we all made such a fuss about him. It is up to us to satisfy their curiosity. It can be done in a phrase. H. G. Wells is the literary Weather-Cock of the age. When the war-clouds banked up on the south-eastern horizon in 1914, he spotted them from afar, and—click !—round he went with the popular gale. Long before the war the Woman Suffrage movement, when it was too strong for a modern thinker to resist, found in him a doughty champion. There never was a more heroic fighter—on the winning side. The moment an enemy turns tail " the world's greatest writer " (as the advertisements call him) will jump and shout and shake his fist and put out his tongue—until it's time to spin round and exhibit his gifts in another direction.

His public behaviour leads one to believe that in extreme youth he was the spoilt child of the family. I feel certain that as a youngster he was perpetually being stuffed with sweets and similar delicacies by fond and admiring relations—a sort of fat boy. As a writer, too, he has been successful from the start, spoilt by good fortune, and he has gone on from triumph to triumph. No poor, neglected, struggling author for him!

When someone happens to disagree with him over one of his touchy subjects, he works himself up into a state of ungovernable fury and attacks his critic with vitriolic violence. His critic naturally thinks that Wells will never speak to him again: indeed he is not at all certain that he wants to speak to Wells again. But he reckons without his antagonist. At the first encounter after one of these utterly unwarrantable attacks, Wells will meet him with extended arms and chat away with extraordinary warmth as though nothing of the smallest consequence had occurred to change their quite brotherly affection for one another. After which the critic feels rather like the Prodigal Son.

Asked to explain one of these devastating onslaughts, our versatile novelist will no doubt apologize profusely, tell his faltering critic not to take him too seriously as he really couldn't help it, he was made like that, and so on.

Some people get annoyed at this kind of thing; but they needn't lose their sleep over it. All they have to do is to picture the fat boy being gorged with plums!

## EDMUND GOSSE

MR. GOSSE—if he is still writing reviews when my book appears, and if he deigns to review mine—will deny me. He will say: "I know not the man." And he will be quite right. Although I have sat in his company twenty times, and once actually sat on his coat-tails, he has probably never seriously considered my existence. We have even been together, he and I, at 10 Downing Street, but he probably thought I was there to help him on with his coat, and no doubt regarded me through his spectacles with mild amazement when I showed no inclination to do so.

After suffering my presence, cheek by jowl so to speak, on fourteen committees, it is recorded that he referred to me in the ensuing phrase, addressed rather despairingly to a fellow committee-man: "Who is this young person?" His query was prompted by a remark I had just made, in a louder tone than usual, on the stupidity of most literary critics.

The answer of his fellow committee-man apparently didn't take root, and he continued to gaze at me, when there was nothing else left to gaze at, with now and then a suspicion of fright in his eyes—as of one who is afraid a tip may be required of him when he has run out of small change.

Like so many other " modern " writers of his period, he refuses to believe that the world has advanced since the death of Ibsen. His quiet little jokes, much appreciated by Peers of the Realm, and his felicitous little apothegms, very popular at genteel tea-parties, have gained him the ear of the Elect. His manners are just what they should be ; he is nothing if not respectable ; and no one, except an anarchist, could possibly take the smallest exception to him.

# ARTHUR BOURCHIER

THERE is a most refreshing breeziness about the personality of Arthur Bourchier. He brings the atmosphere of our drama's good old palmy days back on to the stage. I don't know what those good old palmy days precisely were; but I am positive Arthur Bourchier is a relic of them. Someone talks of the Higher Drama. "Higher Rubbish!" says our Arthur—and the Walls of Jericho promptly collapse. He produces plays that conform to the standard of palmy drama. They usually fail to attract a palmy public, but nothing will induce him to give in. He continues to palm them off as novelties upon playgoers who are quite willing to stand him, but simply won't stomach his mid-Victorian tastes.

He will clinch any argument by dragging in Shakespeare. Not that he really cares for Shakespeare, or understands him, but he is certain that Shakespeare (probably because he wrote spanking big Bourchierian parts) was the palmiest of all our playwrights. The Arthur Bourchiers of two hundred years hence will be bludgeoning their antagonists with the name of Shaw, just as those of to-day knock down theirs with the name of Shakespeare. They will do it all with the utmost good-humour, in a winning, breezy, urbane manner. And they will mention the fact (which might otherwise have escaped their opponents) that they have been at Oxford. Not for any snobbish reason, of course, but merely to prove that they know a little more than a thing or two about the classics and the moderns.

The spectacle of our own particular Bourchier hobnobbing with the great ones of the world has been vouchsafed to me. It was a beautiful, awe-inspiring sight; and one cannot help feeling astonished that his courtier-like qualities have not received some kingly recompense. Alas! the interest of the Royal Family in stage personalities is unavoidably narrowed in several directions. An actor's presence in the Divorce Court is fatal to his presence at the Royal Court, and a nodding acquaintance with His Majesty's judges is not favourable to an acquaintance, however slight, with His Majesty. A leading actor may hobnob with a live Princess—or several live Princesses—but bang goes his knighthood if he dares to "gag" his marriage lines. Everyone will agree that this is a shocking state of affairs. It is terrible to think that a great and good man may be forced to eat his heart out in silence as an ordinary esquire; but so it is. . . . I am wandering from the point. . . .

The Arthur Bourchiers of all ages never move forward. They existed in the beginning and they will be in at the death. The world couldn't get on without them. They are necessary, if only to delay the Millennium. Just imagine how dreadful it would be if every new idea were allowed to expand (and even—God spare us!—fructify) without being held in check by the Bourchier of its time, who merely has to exclaim (breezily, of course) "Bosh!" and "Shakespeare!" in order to settle the matter for a score of years or more!

# MRS. ASQUITH

I ONCE shook hands with Margot. That may not sound particularly exciting. But it was at least an experience. Margot does literally *shake* hands: she doesn't merely present you with three or more fingers. And she's like that herself. To meet her is a distinct mental and physical experience, a sort of personal impact. She comes to grips with you instantly, and she is one of those very uncommon people who insist upon your undivided attention: you couldn't possibly carry on a conversation with her and somebody else at one and the same time.

She has the art of making you believe she thinks a devil of a lot of you, thus achieving her real object, viz., to make you think a devil of a lot of her! Those who succumb to her charms are given a place in her autobiography, with their conversations verbatim. Those who don't succumb to her charms are also given a place in her autobiography, with their conversations *Margotized.* The truly fortunate ones are those who, like myself, are content to shake hands—and then remember an important appointment.

But I was never seriously in danger at all. Because the one great attraction of Margot's

Memoirs to the man in the street is that the authoress appears to have suffered from the most curious lapses of memory whenever she was in the company of the man in the street. . . .

## SIR HALL CAINE

IT would be impossible to impress the personality of Hall Caine on the world more forcefully than he himself has already impressed it. The vision of the domed head, saucer eyes and neatly pointed beard—all resting lightly, aslant, on long, shapely fingers—will be remembered until it is forgotten.

For the benefit of remote posterity, which one can only pray will never cease to be remote, I shall record three scenes in which, I am led to believe, this master-Manxman entirely succeeded in impressing his personality on such contemporaries as were fortunate enough to participate in them.

### SCENE 1. THE DOGGER BANK.

The news was already twenty-four hours old. The country was humming with excitement. Some peaceful English fishing smacks had been fired on by the Russian Baltic Fleet, on its way to join battle with the Japs in the Far East. The editor of a leading London paper was discussing the situation with several members of his staff in the editorial office. Mr. Hall Caine was announced. He entered immediately. The members of the staff moved towards the door. "Don't go, gentlemen," said the great novelist with his well-known courtesy. The door was shut, the members of the staff formed a little group by the fireplace, and Mr. Caine subsided on the nearest sofa. He was visibly agitated, but managed, nevertheless, to subside in the attitude familiarized by the statue of Shakespeare in Leicester Square. He looked at nothing, very intently, for half a minute, and then spoke:

"I can't do it," he said.

"What?" asked the editor.

Hall Caine lifted his head ever so slightly.

"Did you say 'What'?" he murmured.

"Oh, I was forgetting—I must apologize," said the editor; "the latest news had driven your article out of my head;" and then, quickly recollecting himself, he added: "just for a minute, I mean."

Hall Caine sighed deeply. The editor went on:

"Do you really mean you can't write the account for us? But you were on the spot. You saw the smacks come in——"

"Don't remind me of it!" broke in the famous writer; "it will be for ever branded in my memory. The women! The children! Their cries! Ah, too terrible! Too—too—too——"

At this point, being unable to think of a more emphatically expressive word than "terrible" (even Shakespeare sometimes stumbled in his speech), Hall Caine covered his face with his hands, overcome with emotion. After a few moments his natural manliness reasserted itself.

With astonishing self-control he resumed his original position to a square inch and proceeded:

"Knowing the power of my pen, aware of the influence my works exercise on the thoughts of so many people, convinced that a description by me of the Dogger Bank incident might sway the minds of multitudes and plunge this nation into war, I decided to take counsel with my friends. I first approached Lord Rosebery. I laid my misgivings plainly before him. I asked for his advice. 'Your pen,' he said, 'should never be used unworthily; you are right to hesitate; reserve it, I beg you, for the greatest of all causes: Peace and Civilization.' I then called on my old friend the Bishop of London. I informed him of your offer. 'My dear fellow,' he said, taking me by the arm, 'you can only settle a matter of such dreadful moment on your knees. God will help you at this crisis if you call upon Him. As for me, I would not deserve the name of friend if I did not exhort you to hold your hand.'"

Mr. Caine paused, and then got up to go. At the door he turned to the editor and said in the voice of a man who has suffered and triumphed: "I am sorry, deeply sorry, I cannot do as you ask. The considerations that urge me to a refusal are too high to be ignored. Good morning, gentlemen."

## SCENE 2. READING HIS PLAY.

The whole company was assembled, and sat in a semicircle awaiting the author. At last he entered, carrying a portfolio, half an hour late. "This chair is not high enough," said the author. Cushions were sent for. "The cushions are too soft," said the author. Another chair was sent for. "I don't like the position of the light," said the author. The position of the light was changed. "I would like a tilted desk or lectern to read on," said the author. A lectern was fetched from a neighbouring store. "I have forgotten my reading spectacles," said the author. A taxicab was despatched to bring his reading spectacles.

Two hours after the company assembled, the author was adjusting his spectacles. The operation concluded, he glanced over the spectacles at each member of the company, beginning on his extreme left and ending on his extreme right. He then produced a red silk pocket-handkerchief and placed it on the lectern. He coughed slightly twice, and in a low, impressive tone read the words: "Act I, Scene I." He coughed slightly a third time, readjusted his spectacles, glanced once more at the company, as though surprised they hadn't broken out into applause, and then continued. The first word had hardly left his mouth when a barrel-organ immediately beneath the window struck up: "It's a long way to Tipperary." The author sat back in his seat. A nervous tremor passed through the company.

"Will someone go quickly and tell that man," spake the author, "that HALL CAINE is reading his play!"

### SCENE 3. IN CHURCH.

The memorial service for Sir Herbert Tree was being held at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. It was a most impressive service, and the majority of those present were deeply affected. One member of the congregation, more wrought upon than the others and unable to contain his emotion in the pew assigned to him, stepped out into the centre of the aisle and remained for several minutes gazing upwards in a trance-like posture.

"Hullo!" said everyone to his neighbour: "There's **HALL CAINE**!"

The great man, whose noblest inspirations (it is said) come to him on mountain-tops, continued to gaze upwards. . . .

## LEWIS WALLER

HE didn't like it a bit, but he had to pretend he did all the same. I believe it was "Punch" that first satirized the clique of maiden ladies who made poor Waller look ridiculous in and out of season. Our national comic organ called them the "K.O.W. Brigade." (Explanatory note for future historians: K.O.W. = Keen On Waller.)

Lewis Waller was an exceptionally pleasant, hail-fellow-well-met, clubable type of man. And he wasn't half as conceited as he might forgivably have been. He was gifted with a handsome presence and a superb voice. In the art of declaiming Shakespeare he was without a rival in his generation. His voice hadn't the flute-like flexibility, the exquisite timbre, of Forbes-Robertson's; but it had a resonance about it, a bell-like quality, that compelled one's admiration even for such a wretched person as Henry V.

He once told me that he worshipped Shakespeare and never wanted to act in anyone else's plays.

"Then why in the name of conscience don't you go on producing Shakespeare?" I asked.

"I would if I could, but I can't!" he said. "If only I could pay my way, without a cent of profit, I'd stick to Shakespeare. But it's no good. The public want 'Robin Hood' and 'Monsieur Beaucaire'; and after all I must live!"

"But what about your crowds of female admirers? Surely they come regularly to whatever you put on? Their taste in plays is, I understand, catholic. So long as you are in them, they'll be content with anything—from 'Hamlet' to 'Charley's Aunt.'"

Waller's eyes danced with merriment while I was speaking. Then he became grave, and answered my questions with two more: "Will no one rid me of these turbulent priestesses? . . . Besides, what shall it profit a manager if he fill the whole pit and has to paper his stalls?"

So, as I said before, he didn't like it a bit, but he had to pretend he did all the same. . . .

## WINSTON CHURCHILL

NOTHING short of death will prevent Winston from becoming Prime Minister of the country for which he has so nobly sacrificed all his principles. Our front benchers would be lost without him. Firstly because he has a very pretty wit and is a master of the art of saying nothing at great length. Secondly because his hand never trembles as he throws the dice at the Whitehall Gambling Saloons.

He is the Jack-in-the-box of the English political world—like his ancestors before him. No power on earth will keep him boxed up for long. The man who can survive the Antwerp and Gallipoli hazards of the late war will survive anything except national education.

Like most men of his class, he is a half-finished product. His knowledge is synoptic, his instincts barbarous. But he has the supreme gift of plausibility, and this, in the ordinary course of things, should land us into several dozen minor campaigns and possibly one or two more spanking big wars before he is laid to rest by a sorrowing and grateful nation in Westminster Abbey.

I have only once known him to be temporarily cornered in an argument. Someone asked him to say, honestly, whether he thought the recurrence of war for its own sake morally justifiable. Winston dashed off a lengthy series of qualifications and historical instances to prove, in effect, that there was a great deal to be said in favour of it. His interlocutor wouldn't be put off; he repeated his question, adding the emphatic: "*Yes or No?*"

Winston was momentarily nonplussed; then, with an effort, he rose to the occasion in true parliamentary style—

"Ye. . . . O!" he said.

## JOSEPH CONRAD

IT is remarkable how willing we are, as a nation, to idolize anything we don't produce—particularly if the product flatters us by taking up his, her or its residence among us as naturally as any home-bred substance. Of course the foreign import—whether animal, vegetable or mineral—has to fight tooth and nail for recognition; but when once we take it to our hearts and homes, nothing is good enough for it. It begins to assume a sort of Divine Right. It can do no wrong. It is better, far better, than anything originally our own. Look at the difficulties it has had to encounter! Look at the obstacles it has had to surmount!

Mr. Joseph Conrad has taken the country by storm. From the moment of his first success each work has been pronounced greater than its predecessor. The English language has been ransacked for superlatives to do his genius justice. I tremble to think what will happen when his next book appears. May I venture the suggestion that the critics should, for the future, discuss him in Sanskrit? Otherwise they will be forced to repeat everything they've already said.

What is the grand secret of Conrad's success? Not, I am convinced, his genius; because there was real genius in his earlier works, and they were not successful. I am afraid his popularity has been gained by his style. It is a style that hints at immensities, at vastnesses, at expanses, at illimitables—at anything, in fact, that a walled-in, boxed-down, mentally-cramped, urban population knows nothing about and therefore dotes upon. The souls of his readers wander aimlessly through the star-lit spaces, trying to find expression in those terrific silences. The creed was revealed to me not long ago by an ardent Conradian in these mystical words:

"Heavens alive, man! One can even feel his dots. . . ."

# DEAN INGE

I MET the "Gloomy Dean" before he became gloomy or a dean—at least before he became notoriously gloomy. He was never, I believe, renowned for joviality. In those days he had a fashionable congregation somewhere west of Hyde Park Corner, and he was to be seen sipping tea in swagger drawing-rooms not a hundred miles from Prince's Gate.

He had always what I may describe as a "down on democracy." He is, as a matter of fact, a typical product of the Upper Middle Class, and he cannot forget that the Duke of Wellington was reported to have said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton. His "Outspoken Essays" are regarded as courageous merely because they are by the Dean of St. Paul's. His so-called advanced views are no more advanced than Plato's, and he can thank the classics for whatever fame he has achieved.

He is simply a class-prejudiced clergyman who happened not to skip Demosthenes at school, and his hatred of Trades Unions is founded on an ineradicable belief that the rest of the world is in a conspiracy against him.

# MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL

GEORGE ALEXANDER told me that the most remarkable discovery he had ever made in his life was Mrs. Patrick Campbell—and that he had never ceased to regret it!

Mrs. Pat is the most astonishing and the most disconcerting actress on the English stage. To quote Tree: "When she's good, she's divinely good; but when she's bad—oh, my God!" She can make or mar a play. No one ever had more of the true histrionic afflatus than she. And no one ever more carelessly treated such gifts. Alternately she will make you want to rise from your seat and cheer her to the echo, or rise from your seat and walk out of the theatre.

She can, and does, produce the same contrary effects upon her managers (*managers* indeed!) and her fellow-artists. She either drives them frantic with despair or makes them want to lick her boots. I have known occasions when everyone in the theatre was running about doing things, or trying to find things to do, for Mrs. Pat; and I have known other occasions when everyone in the theatre, from manager to call-boy, was locked up in a distant room, or otherwise concealed, for the purpose of tearing his hair in sacred solitude. According to the whim of the moment she can transport those about her to Heaven or Hanwell!

That unique temperament or hers has brought our dramatists and theatrical managers to their knees. They entreat her to play their Mrs. Tanquerays and what-nots, because no other living actress is a conceivable substitute, but shudder at the fate that may overtake them the moment she darkens the stage-door!

She can't help it. She was made like that. God be praised for it! And the Devil be damned for it!

## FATHER BERNARD VAUGHAN

A CLERGYMAN has this tremendous advantage over a layman: he is taken on trust. It is assumed that a cassock and a comic collar transform a man internally as well as externally. Certain things are definitely expected of reverend gentlemen. Among other things, reverence itself is expected of them—reverence for customs and conventions no less than for creeds. Thus, when a priest proclaims from the pulpit certain matters that everyone except a priest is supposed to know, he immediately reaches a fame that is only attained in other spheres by geniuses, criminals and polyandrous actresses.

This is an age of self-advertisement. The successful man, the famous man, the popular man is the one who booms himself to the best advantage. Luckily most clergymen don't boom with the rest of us for all they are worth, but are generally content to intone to select and dwindling congregations of their own. Here and there, however, a man of God springs forth into the arena, filled with that rare and exalted spirit of denunciation which characterized his primitive predecessors. Of such is Dean Inge. Of such was Bernard Vaughan in the first decade of the present century. He is now, for all practical purposes, a back-number, largely because he began by shouting so loud that his lungs couldn't keep pace with his indignation. Also people got tired of being bawled at on one note.

I have been near him in restaurants, at private views, and in the mansions of the great. Once I spoke to him for several minutes together; but I couldn't regard our conversation as in any sense intimate, because he contrived simultaneously to address everybody else within earshot.

Yet I would be the last to complain of our Bernard Vaughans; for though as demagogues they eclipse the laity of nations, they never fail to increase the public stock of harmless pleasure. . . .

## IRENE VANBRUGH

THE mere existence of Irene Vanbrugh is a standing reproach to the modern stage. What juvenile actress of the present day has an earthly chance of taking her place —or anything like her place? She went on the stage at a time when one had to win through by sheer merit. Her art is an art, not a trick of personality.

The London stage of to-day is overrun by flappers and jazzers. A lady has to be either killingly beautiful or killingly herself, somehow or otherhow, to be a really big success. She doesn't have to act: she has to allure. Preferably, too, there should be just a breath of scandal about her, because an unspotted domestic life will never cause a run on the box office. She doesn't have to learn a job. (Why worry about learning a job when one gets paid better for being, adorably, oneself?) Instead, she plays golf, attends tea-parties in fashionable West End restaurants, gambles, smokes cigarettes or eats chocolates in her spare moments, talks thirteen to the dozen (chiefly about nothing), and finishes off the rollicking day with a pirouette.

We cannot be too grateful for the fact that when Irene Vanbrugh commenced her career, the public and the managers had not yet discovered that a single success, repeated *ad nauseam*, was the only requisite of a "star" actress. They even realized that it was not necessary for a lady to resemble an orthodox portrait of St. Agatha in order to give a good performance. Perhaps one may go so far as to say that they actually preferred human versatility to human statuary!

## LLOYD GEORGE

TO the question: "What do you think of the present state of affairs?" the Prime Minister replied:

"The eruption is subsiding: the lava is cooling. Black clouds have been shrouding the valley, but already I see glimpses of the sun upon the mountain-tops. The ship of state has been buffeted by squalls and hurricanes; and though the pilot's hair is now a trifle bleached, the port is in sight and we will soon slip anchor in calmer waters than those through which we have manfully ploughed."

"But," I said, "what of the Unemployment question?"

"I am coming to that," answered the Premier. "The sharks are surrounding the vessel, and we must throw them all the waste food we can spare to keep them from gnawing the rudder. They poison the waters about us, while we are prostrated with thirst. Sooner or later the crew must perish or overcome these despoilers of plenty. . . ."

"How do you propose to deal with the serious question of high prices and lowering wages?" I broke in.

"I will tell you," said the Premier. "The corn is standing thick in the fields, but the reapers are wrangling in the market-place. Our ships go out to India, to America, to South Africa, to China—yea, even to the Antipodes—but they go with empty holds. In ten years'—five years'—two years' time . . . "

" Are there, then, *no* bright spots on the horizon ? "

" I hear a rumbling under the earth . . . Oh, that reminds me ! I have to meet the Union leaders at the House in ten minutes. Good-morning. I think I have answered all your questions."

And, with a gracious bow, Mr. Lloyd George slipped from the room.

(N.B. Feeling that, at such a serious moment in our country's history, the foregoing passages from my interview with the Prime Minister will help and inspire all classes of the community, I have arranged with the publishers that no action shall be taken against any infringement of the copyright as it concerns this particular Post-Impression.)

## GENEVIÈVE WARD

I HAVE only seen one actress of the grand style in my life. Her name: Geneviève Ward. By a remarkable stroke of good fortune her Volumnia in "Coriolanus," her Margaret in "Richard III" have survived their own dramatic epoch and have been seen by a Revue-ridden generation.

I take pride in the fact that I have played with her too; and it was, if possible, a more wonderful experience to do that than to watch her from the stalls.

Geneviève Ward is, I suppose, the last in the line of a great tradition. It was a tradition of histrionic technique. Freeness of movement, fullness of gesture, richness of declamation, breadth of conception—all these went to the making of that grand manner which built up the tradition and which will pass away for ever with "our last tragedienne."

The spacious days of Burbage and Betterton, Mrs. Siddons and David Garrick, Edmund Kean and Henry Irving, are over and done with. The tradition, which goes back to Marlowe, is now as dead as Samuel Phelps—and not a little of Shakespeare's stage popularity was buried with the wonderful old actor of Sadler's Wells.

We are fortunate to have come into the world just in time to catch the thrill of that great school, imparted to us by the flaming art of Geneviève Ward.

## "JOHN BULL"

THE sincerity of our big public men has frequently been called in question. Personally, I refuse to believe that an insincere man can reach eminence and gain popular esteem.

Perhaps the biggest of all our big men—and therefore, according to my calculation, the most sincere—is Mr. Horatio Bottomley.

I shall never forget a wonderful evening in the North sometime during the great war. Mr. Bottomley was announced as the principal speaker, and the hall was crammed from floor to ceiling. Never, surely, was this always-powerful orator more potent. His auditors were moved and enchanted beyond words. I cannot (who could ?) give any idea of the emotion that seized and choked us at points in his astonishing discourse. His peroration still haunts me—a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. The enthusiasm it evoked was as "unprecedented" as it always is whenever Mr. Bottomley speaks.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "there are three things that are going to win us this war. One thing is our position in regard to munitions." At this point the speaker said a few words about the munitions situation generally. He continued: "The second thing that will help us through this terrible ordeal is that we are Englishmen!" This sentiment was naturally greeted with an immense outburst of cheering. For several minutes Mr. Bottomley stood erect on the platform waiting for the silence that patriotism would hardly give. At last he held up his hand and order was restored. In solemn tones the orator proceeded:

"And the last thing, ladies and gentlemen, that will—beyond cavil or question—give us Victory Triumphant is THAT THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN!"

At these inspiring words the whole audience rose as one man and nearly lifted the roof off. Mr. Bottomley bent before the deafening roar, and then, with a bashfulness that does him honour, quietly disappeared from the public gaze. He was naturally pleased at the success of his efforts in the sacred cause of Humanity, but being a really big man he minimized the true extent of his magnificent achievement by saying to the first person he ran up against after leaving the stage:

"That fetched 'em—what?"

## THE IRVINGS

THE brothers, H. B. and Laurence Irving, were a curious pair. Great things were at one time expected of H. B., but they never came to anything. Great things were then expected of Laurence, but they never came to anything either.

I am informed, and am quite willing to believe, that H. B. Irving was a rattling good actor when he took the town by storm as The Admirable Crichton. But when I first saw him, he was hard at work modelling himself on his father and acting in his father's tenth-rate melodramas. Having reverently prostrated himself before the tradition of Sir Henry, he never properly got on his feet again; and whenever he essayed a serious rôle, he succumbed to the illusion that, to be thoroughly effective, the words should be spoken in a moan or a wail. Unfortunately his father died before I left school, and I never saw him; but I assume that the mantle of Elijah fell upon the shoulders of Elisha, his first-born, and practically smothered him in the process. H. B. was a first-rate comedian. A Repertory Theatre would have picked him out consistently for its Charley's Aunts and its Private Secretaries. But his performance of Hamlet should have been forbidden by Act of

Parliament. It was too bad even to make jokes about. . . .

Brother Laurence was something of a scholar. He was excellent in "thinking" parts, and once, in "Typhoon," he achieved greatness. I think he must have had more of his father's peculiar genius than his brother, because there were moments of quite superb tragic force in his acting. He was a naturally morbid man—suicidally so—and the influence of Russia and Russian literature upon him were not of a kind to dispel his constitutional gloom. He didn't, like his brother, display a dilettantish interest in crime. He knew too much about it. . . .

All in all, I imagine H. B. inherited his father's superficial, and Laurence his father's fundamental, characteristics. Neither of them added much to their inheritance.

# THE CHESTERTONS

I SENT several essays to Cecil Chesterton, when he was editor of "The New Witness." They were, in my opinion, very good essays. I mentioned in my letter that it was just possible my work showed the influence of his famous brother G. K. C., whose writings at that time were making a great impression on me. Cecil replied gracefully, asking me to come and see him.

"I like your essays very much indeed," he said; "would you care to try your hand at reviews of novels for the 'Witness'? I can offer you £3 a week."

"Very sorry," said I, "but I can't write about what doesn't interest me. Novels don't interest me. If you'll put me on to the historical stuff, memoirs, etc., I'll be delighted."

He shook his head. "Full up!—sorry—very sorry—can't be helped, I suppose—but I'd like to have you working here if only because of my brother."

I didn't quite catch his meaning. "Your brother!" I exclaimed; "what's he got to do with it?"

He looked at me severely. "You are a friend of his, I understood you to say?"

"You misunderstood me. I said in my letter that he had influenced me—that is all!"

Cecil searched for my letter, found it eventually, and held the sheet about two inches from his nose as he read it. Then he rose, held out his hand, wished me a " good-morning "—and I left hurriedly.

" The love of brothers passeth all understanding," I murmured as I turned into the Strand. . . .

A year later I was in a public-house somewhere in the region of Fleet Street. An enormous person with bushy hair, a moustache and eyeglasses, filled a good third of the saloon. " That," I said to myself, " can be no other than the creator of ' Sunday '."

I edged round him and got to a position from which I could address him with a minimum of discomfort to either of us.

" How's your brother ? " I demanded.

His glasses fell from his eyes and he muttered to himself several words, of which I caught only the following : " Where does he pick them up ? "

I ordered a bitter while he was recovering. At last he said, in a low voice : " Is this your first drink to-day ? "

" Yes," I replied.

" Scandalous ! " he said, and added quickly : " Your health ! "

" Yours ! " I reciprocated. " By the way," I went on, " there is one thing about you that has always puzzled me. Why do you run down the eighteen-nineties, and especially its god, Oscar Wilde, when your own works are just as paradoxical, just as—forgive me—absurd, though not as amusing, as his ? Indeed, in many respects, you are a disciple of Wilde's."

G. K. C. paused, with his mug half-way to his mouth. "I have heard that heresy before!" he thundered; and then, with an awful solemnity, he vindicated the seriousness of his calling in these words: "The wildest thing that has ever been said about me is that I am influenced by Wilde. Wilde's writings are essentially refined. It is vulgar to be refined. I am not refined and I am not vulgar, though (thank God!) I am low. Lowliness is next to godliness. The Eternal Bar is reached by way of the public bar: the tap-root of heaven is the tap-room of earth. It follows that the Kingdom of Heaven can only be entered with a bottle of Bass's pale ale in either hand. Now Wilde was sufficient of a snob to attempt admission with champagne —or even sherbet!—and I haven't the least doubt that Peter (whose surname, by the way, was Guinness) refused him."

There was a dead silence. The spell was at length broken by someone calling for a pint of 'arf-an-'arf.

"What is your name?" suddenly asked G. K. C.

"M or N," I answered, feeling at the moment that I might be in the presence of the Almighty.

"Sunday" lifted his hand and was on the point of opening his mouth when, with a mighty effort, I regained my earthly consciousness and vanished.

It is all I can do to prevent my hand from automatically rising to my hat whenever I pass that apostolic pub. . . .

## GERALD CUMBERLAND

IT is a pity that Gerald Cumberland doesn't stick to racey impressions of his contemporaries. He does that kind of thing so much better than the serious stuff he has attempted since. Not that I think the personal sketches in his first book have any lasting value—he hasn't enough critical power for that—but they are at least entertaining, if rather hard on himself. He isn't half as unpleasant as they make him out to be. He's a friendly, jovial little man, with a taking twinkle in his eyes; and he appears to labour under the quite charming delusion that he can write love-stories.

He brought a most enjoyable morning's chat to a close by asking me if I would like a copy of his "Tales of a Cruel Country." Naturally I said I would be delighted. Before handing me the book he said he would mark which, in his opinion, were the best stories in it. "Very interesting" I assented as he searched for a pencil. He then proceeded to mark each story from the top downwards, without missing a single title. I stopped him at about the eighth and suggested that it would save time if he put a cross against those (if there were any) which in his opinion weren't *quite* as good as the others. He agreed, and put a cross against two stories out of a total of twenty-two.

After reading the book, I did not want to quarrel with him over those two. . . .

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